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CHECKMATE.

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# CHECKMATE.

VOL. III.

# CHECKMATE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"UNCLE SILAS," "THE HOUSE BY THE CHURCHYARD,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# CHECKMATE.

## CHAPTER I.

### MR. LONGCLUSE SEES A FRIEND.

SIR REGINALD ARDEN, then, is actually dead and buried, and is quite done with the pomps and vanities, the business and the miseries of life—dead as King Duncan, and cannot come out of his grave to trouble any one with protest or interference; and his son, Sir Richard, is in possession of the title, and seized of the acres, and uses them, without caring to trouble himself with conjectures as to what his father would have liked or abhorred.

A week has passed since the funeral. Lady May has spent two days at Mortlake, and then gone down to Brighton. Alice does not leave

Mortlake: her spirits do not rise. Kind Lady May has done her best to persuade her to come down with her to Brighton, but the perversity or the indolence of grief has prevailed, and Alice has grown more melancholy and self-upbraiding about her quarrel with her father, and will not be persuaded to leave Mortlake, the very worst place she could have chosen, as Lady May protests, for a residence during her mourning. Perhaps in a little while she may feel equal to the effort, but now she can't. She has quite lost her energy, and the idea of a place like Brighton, or even the chance of meeting people, is odious to her.

"So, my dear, do what I may, there she will remain, in that *triste* place," says Lady May Penrose; "and her brother, Sir Richard, has so much business just now on his hands, that he is often away two or three days at a time, and then she stays moping there quite alone; and only that she likes gardening and flowers, and that kind of thing, I really think she would go melancholy mad. But you know that kind of folly can't go on always, and I am determined to take her away in a month or so. People at

first are so morbid, and make recluses of themselves."

Lady May stayed away at Brighton for about a week. On her return, Mr. Longcluse called to see her.

"It was so kind of you, Mr. Longcluse, to take all the trouble you did about that terrible business! and it was perfectly successful. There was not the slightest unpleasantness."

"Yes, I knew I had made anything of that kind all but impossible, but you are not to thank me. It made me only too happy to have an opportunity of being of any use—of relieving any anxiety."

Longcluse sighed.

"You have placed me, I know, under a great obligation, and if every one felt it as I do, you would have been thanked as you deserved before now."

A little silence followed.

"How is Miss Arden?" asked he in a low tone, and hardly raising his eyes.

"Pretty well," she answered, a little dryly. "She's not very wise, I think, in planning to shut herself up so entirely in that melan-

choly place, Mortlake. You have seen it?"

"Yes, more than once," he answered.

Lady May appeared more embarrassed as Mr. Longcluse grew less so. They became silent again. Mr. Longcluse was the first to speak, which he did a little hesitatingly.

"I was going to say that I hoped Miss Arden was not vexed at my having ventured to interfere as I did."

"Oh! about that, of course there ought to be, as I said, but one opinion; but you know she is not herself just now, and I shall have, perhaps, something to tell by-and-by; and, to say truth —you won't be vexed—but I'm sorry I undertook to speak to her, for on that point I really don't quite understand her; and I am a little vexed—and—I'll talk to you more another time. I'm obliged to keep an appointment just now, and the carriage," she added, glancing at the *pendule* on the bracket close by, "will be at the door in two or three minutes; so I must do a very ungracious thing, and say good-bye; and you must come again very soon—come to luncheon to-morrow—you must, really; I won't let you off, I assure you: there are two or three

people coming to see me, whom I think you would like to meet."

And, looking very good-natured, and a little flushed, and rather avoiding Mr. Longcluse's dark eyes, she departed.

He had been thinking of paying Miss Maubray a visit, but he had not avowed, even to himself, how high his hopes had mounted; and here was, in Lady May's ominous manner and determined evasion, matter to disturb and even shock him. Instead, therefore, of pursuing the route he had originally designed, he strolled into the park, and under the shade of green boughs he walked, amid the twitter of birds and the prattle of children and nursery-maids, with despair at his heart, and a brain in chaos.

As he sauntered, with downcast looks, under the trees, he came upon a humble Hebrew friend, Mr. Goldshed, a magnate in his own circle, but dwarfed into nothing beside the paragon of Mammon who walked on the grass, so unpretentiously, and with a face as anxious as that of the greengrocer who had just been supplicating the Jew for a renewal of his twenty-five pound bill.

Mr. Goldshed came to a full stop a little way in advance of Mr. Longcluse, anxious to attract his attention. Mr. Longcluse did see him, as he sauntered on; and the fat old Jew, with the seedy velvet waistcoat, crossed with gold chains, and with an old-fashioned gold eye-glass dangling at his breast, first smiled engagingly, then looked reverential and solemn, and then smiled again with his great moist lips, and raised his hat. Longcluse gave him a sharp, short nod, and intended to pass him.

"Will you shpare me one word, Mr. Lonclushe?"

"Not to-day, sir."

"But I've been to your chambers, sir, and to your houshe, Mr. Lonclushe."

"You've wasted time—waste no more."

"I do assure you, shir, it'sh very urgent."

"I don't care."

"It'sh about that East Indian thing," and he lowered his voice as he concluded the sentence.

"I don't care a pin, sir."

The amiable Mr. Goldshed hesitated; Mr.

Longcluse passed him as if he had been a post. He turned, however, and walked a few steps by Mr. Longcluse's side.

"And everything elshe is going sho vell; and it would look fishy, don't you think, to let thish thing go that way?"

"Let them go—and go you with them. I wish the earth would swallow you all—scrip, bonds, children, and beldames." And if a stamp could have made the earth open at his bidding, it would have yawned wide enough at that instant. "If you follow me another step, by Heaven, I'll make it unpleasant to you."

Mr. Longcluse looked so angry, that the Jew made him an unctuous bow, and remained fixed for a while to the earth, gazing after his patron with his hands in his pockets; and, with a gloomy countenance, he took forth a big cigar from his case, lighted a vesuvian, and began to smoke, still looking after Mr. Longcluse.

That gentleman sauntered on, striking his stick now and then to the ground, or waving it over the grass in as many odd flourishes as a magician in a pantomime traces with his wand.

If men are prone to teaze themselves with imaginations, they are equally disposed to comfort themselves with the same shadowy influences.

"I'm so nervous about this thing, and so anxious, that I exaggerate everything that seems to tell against me. How did I ever come to love her so? And yet, would I kill that love if I could? Should I not kill myself first? I'll go and see Miss Maubray—I may hear something from her. Lady May *was* embarrassed: what then? Were I a simple observer of such a scene in the case of another, I should say there was nothing in it more than this—that she had quite forgotten all about her promise. She never mentioned my name, and when the moment came, and I had come to ask for an account, she did not know what to say. It was well done, to see old Mrs. Tansey as I did. Lady May is so good-natured, and would feel her little neglect so much, and she will be sure to make it up. Fifty things may have prevented her. Yes, I'll go and hear what Miss Maubray has to say, and I'll lunch with Lady May

to-morrow. I suspect that her visit to-day was to Mortlake."

With these reflections, Mr. Longcluse's pace became brisker, and his countenance brightened.

## CHAPTER II.

### A HOPE EXPIRES.

MR. LONGCLUSE knocked at Mr. David Arden's door. Yes, Miss Maubray was at home. He mounted the stairs, and was duly announced at the drawing-room door, and saw the brilliant young lady, who received him very graciously. She was alone.

Mr. Longcluse began by saying that the weather was cooler, and the sun much less intolerable.

"I wish we could say as much for the people, though, indeed, they are cool enough. There are some people called Tramways: he's a baronet—a very new one. Do you know anything of them? Are they people one can know?"

"I only know that Lady Tramway chaperon-

ed a very charming young lady, whom everybody is very glad to know, to Lady May's garden-party the other day, at Richmond."

"Yes, very true; I'm that young lady, and that is the very reason I want to know. My uncle placed me in their hands."

"Oh, he knows everybody."

"Yes, and every one, which is quite another thing; and the woman has never given me an hour's quiet since. She presents me with bouquets, and fruit, and every imaginable thing I don't want, herself included, at least once a day; and I assure you I live in hourly terror of her getting into the drawing-room. You don't know anything about them?"

"I only know that her husband made a great deal of money by a contract."

"That sounds very badly, and she is such a vulgar woman!"

"I know no more of them; but Lady May had her to Raleigh Hall, and surely she can satisfy your scruples."

"No; it was my guardian who asked for their card, so that goes for nothing. It is really too bad."

"My heart bleeds for you."

"By-the-by, talking of Lady May, I had a visit from her not a quarter of an hour ago. What a fuss our friends at Mortlake do make about the death of that disagreeable old man!—Alice, I mean. Richard Arden bears it wonderfully. When did you see either?" she asked innocently.

"You forget he has not been dead three weeks, and Alice Arden is not likely to see any one but very intimate friends for a long time; and—and I dare say you have heard that Sir Richard Arden and I are not on very pleasant terms."

"'Oh! Pity such difference should be——'"

"Thanks, and Tweedledum and Tweedledee are not likely to make it up. I'm afraid people aren't always reasonable, you know, and expect, often, things that are not quite fair."

"He ought to marry some one with money, and give up play."

"What! give up play, and commence husband? I'm afraid he'd think that a rather dull life."

"Well, I'm sure I'm no judge of that, al-

though I give an opinion. Whatever he may be, you have a very staunch friend in Lady May."

"I'm glad of that; she's always so kind." And he looked rather oddly at the young lady.

Perhaps she seemed conscious of a knowledge more than she had yet divulged.

This young lady was, I need not tell you, a little coarse. She had, when she liked, the frankness that can come pretty boldly to the point; but I think she could be sly enough when she pleased; and was she just a little mischievous?

"Lady May has been talking to me a great deal about Alice Arden. She has been to see her very often since that poor old man died, and she says—she says, Mr. Longcluse—will you be upon honour not to repeat this?"

"Certainly, upon my honour."

"Well, she says——"

Miss Maubray gets up quickly, and settles some flowers over the chimney-piece.

"She says that there is a coolness in that quarter also."

"I don't quite see," says Mr. Longcluse.

"Well, I must tell you she has taken me into council, and told me a great deal; and she spoke to Alice, and wrote to her. Did she say she would show you the answer? I have got it; she left it with me, and asked me—she's so good-natured—to use my influence—she said *my* influence! She ought to know I've *no* influence."

Longcluse felt very oddly indeed during this speech; he had still presence of mind not to add anything to the knowledge the young lady might actually possess.

"You have not said a great deal, you know; but Lady May certainly did promise to show me an answer which she expected to a note she wrote about three weeks ago, or less, to Miss Arden."

"I really don't know of what use I can be in the matter. I have no excuse for speaking to Alice on the subject of her note—none in the world. I think I may as well let you see it; but you will promise—you *have* promised—not to tell any one?"

"I have—I do—I promise. Lady May herself said she would show me that letter."

"Well, I can't, I suppose, be very wrong. It is only a note: it does not say much, but quite enough, I'm afraid, to make it useless, and almost impertinent, for me, or any one else, to say a word more on the subject to Alice Arden."

All this time she is opening a very pretty marqueterie writing-desk, on spiral legs, which Longcluse has been listlessly admiring, little thinking what it contains. She now produced a little note, which, disengaging from its envelope, she places in the hand that Mr. Longcluse extended to receive it.

"I do so hope," she said, as she gave it to him, "that I am doing what Lady May would wish. I think she shrank a little from showing it to you herself, but I am certain she wished you to know what is in it."

He opened it quickly. It ran thus ("Merry," I must remark, was a pet name, originating, perhaps, in Shakespeare's song that speaks of "the merry month of May"):—

"DEAREST MERRY,—I hope you will come to see me to-morrow. I cannot yet bear the idea of going into town. I feel as if I never should, and I think I grow more and more miserable every day. You are one of the very few friends

whom I can see. You can't think what a pleasure a call from you is—if, indeed, in my miserable state I can call anything a pleasure. I have read your letter about Mr. Longcluse, and parts of it a little puzzle me. I can't say that I have anything to forgive, and I am sure he has acted just as kindly as you say. But our acquaintance has ended, and nothing shall ever induce me renew it. I can give yon fifty reasons, when I see you, for my not choosing to know him. Darling Merry, I have quite made up my mind upon this point. I *don't* know Mr. Longcluse, and I *won't* know Mr. Longcluse; and I'll tell you *all* my reasons, if you wish to hear them, when we meet. Some of them, which seem to me *more* than sufficient, you do know. The only condition I make is that you don't discuss them with me. I have grown so stupid that *I* really cannot. I only know that I am right, and that *nothing* can chauge me. Come, darling, and see me very soon. You have no idea how very wretched I am. But I do not complain: it has drawn me, I hope, to higher and better thoughts. The world is not what it was to me, and I pray it never may be. Come and see me soon, darling; you cannot think how I long to see you.—Your affectionate "ALICE ARDEN."

"What mountains of molehills!" said Mr. Longcluse, very gently, smiling with a little shrug, as he placed the letter again in Miss Maubray's hand.

"Making such a fuss about that poor old man's death! It certainly does look a little like a pretty affectation. Isn't that what you mean? He *was* so *insupportable!*"

"No, I know nothing about that. I mean such a ridiculous fuss about nothing. Why, people cease to be acquainted every day for much less reason. Sir Reginald chose to talk over his money matters with me, and I think he expected me to do things which no stranger could be reasonably invited to do. And I suppose, now that he is gone, Miss Arden resents my insensibility to his hints; and I dare say Sir Richard, who, I may say, on precisely similar grounds, chooses to quarrel with me, does not spare invective, and has, of course, a friendly listener in his sister. But how absurdly provoking that Lady May should have made such a diplomacy, and given herself so much trouble! And—I'm afraid I appear so foolish—I merely assented to Lady May's kind proposal to mediate, and I could not, of course, appear to think it a less important mission than she did; and—where are you going—Scotland? Italy?"

"My guardian, Mr. Arden, has not yet settled anything," she answered; and upon this, Mr. Longclose begins to recommend, and with much animation to describe, several Continental routes, and then he tells her all his gossip, and takes

his leave, apparently in very happy spirits.

I doubt very much whether the face can ever be taught to lie as impudently as the tongue. Its muscles, of course, can be trained; but the young lady thought that Mr. Longcluse's pallor, as he smiled and returned the note, was more intense, and his dark eyes strangely fierce.

"He was more vexed than he cared to say," thought the young lady. "Lady May has not told me the whole story yet. There has been a great deal of fibbing, but I shall know it all."

Mr. Longcluse had to dine out. He drove home to dress. On arriving he first sat down and wrote a note to Lady May.

"DEAR LADY MAY,—I am so grateful. Miss Maubray told me to-day all the trouble you have been taking for me. Pray think no more of that little vexation. I never took so serious a view of so commonplace an unpleasantness, as to dream of tasking your kindness so severely. I am quite ashamed of having given you so much trouble.

"Yours, dear Lady May, sincerely,

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

"P.S.—I don't forget your kind invitation to lunch to-morrow."

Longcluse dispatched this note, and then wrote a few words of apology to the giver of

the City dinner, to which he had intended to go. He could not go. He was very much agitated: he knew that he could not endure the long constraint of that banquet. He was unfit, for the present, to bear the company of any one. Gloomy and melancholy was the pale face of this man, as if he were going to the funeral of his beloved, when he stepped from his door in the dark. Was he going to walk out to Mortlake, and shoot himself on the steps?

As Mr. Longcluse walked into town, he caught a passing sight of a handsome young face that jarred upon him. It was that of Richard Arden, who was walking, also alone, not under any wild impulse, but to keep an appointment. This handsome face appeared for a moment gliding by, and was lost. Melancholy and thoughtful he looked, and quite unconscious of the near vicinity of his pale adversary. We shall follow him to his place of rendezvous. He walked quickly by Pall Mall, and down Parliament Street, into the ancient quarter of Westminster, turned into a street near the Abbey, and from it into another that ran toward the river. Here were tall and dingy mansions, some of which

were let out as chambers. In one of these, in a room over the front drawing-room, Mr. Levi received his West-end clients; and here, by appointment, he awaited Sir Richard Arden.

The young Baronet, a little paler, and with the tired look of a man who was made acquainted with care, enters this room, hot with the dry atmosphere of gas-light. With his back towards the door, and his feet on the fender, smoking, sits Mr. Levi. Sir Richard does not remove his hat, and he stands by the table, which he slaps once or twice sharply with his stick. Mr. Levi turns about, looking, in his own phrase, unusually "down in the mouth," and his big black eyes are glowing angrily.

"Ho! Shir Richard Harden," he says, rising, "I did not think we was sho near the time. Izh it a bit too soon?"

"A little later than the time I named."

"Crikey! sho it izh."

## CHAPTER III.

### LEVI'S APOLOGUE.

THE room had once been a stately one. Three tall windows looked toward the street. Its cornices and door-cases were ponderous, and its furniture was heterogeneous, and presented the contrasts that might be expected in a broker's store. A second-hand Turkey carpet, in a very dusty state, covered part of the floor; and a dirty canvas sack lay by the door, for people coming in to rub their feet on. The table was a round one, that turned on a pivot; it was oak, massive and carved, with drawers; there were two huge gilt arm-chairs covered with Utrecht velvet, a battered office-stool, and two or three bed-room chairs that did not match. There were two great iron safes on tressels. On the top of one was some valuable

old china, and on the other an electrifying machine; a French harp with only half-a-dozen strings stood in the corner near the fire-place, and several dusty pictures of various sizes leaned with their faces against the wall. A jet of gas burned right over the table, and had blackened the ceiling by long use, and a dip candle, from which Mr. Levi lighted his cigars, burned in a brass candlestick on the hob of the empty grate. Over everything lay a dark grey drift of dust. And the two figures, the elegant young man in deep mourning, and the fierce vulgar little Jew, shimmering all over with chains, rings, pins, and trinkets, stood in a narrow circle of light, in strong relief against the dim walls of the large room.

"So you *will* want that bit o' money in hand?" said Mr. Levi.

"I told you so."

"Don't you think they'll ever get tired helpin' you, if you keep pulling alwaysh the wrong way?"

"You said, this morning, I might reckon upon the help of that friend to any extent within reason," said Sir Richard a little sourly.

"Ye're goin' fashter than yer friendsh li-likesh; ye're goin' al-ash—ye're goin' a terrible lick, you are!" said Mr. Levi solemnly.

His usually pale face was a little flushed; he was speaking rather thickly, and there came at intervals a small hiccough, which indicated that he had been making merry.

"That's my own affair, I fancy," replied Sir Richard, as haughtily as prudence would permit. "You are simply an agent."

"Wish shome muff would take it off my hands; 'shan agenshy tha'll bring whoever takesh it more tr-tr-ouble than tin. By my shoul I'll not keepsh long! I'm blowsh if I'll be fool no longer!"

"I'm to suppose, then, that you have made up your mind to act no longer for my friend, whoever that friend may be?" said Sir Richard, who boded no good to himself from that step.

Mr. Levi nodded surlily.

"Have you drawn those bills?"

Mr. Levi gave the table a spin, unlocked a drawer, and threw two bills across to Sir Richard, who glancing at them said—

"The date is ridiculously short!"

"How can I 'elp 't? and the interesht shlesh than nothin': sh-shunder the bank termsh f-or the besht paper going—I'm blesht if it ain't—it ain't f-fair interesh; the timesh short becaushe the partiesh, theysh—theyshay they're 'ard hup, shir, 'eavy sharge to pay hoff, and a big purchashe in Austriansh!"

"My uncle, David Arden, I happen to know, is buying Austrian stock this week; and Lady May Penrose is to pay off a charge on her property next month."

The Jew smiled mysteriously.

"You may as well be frank with me," added Sir Richard Arden, pleased at having detected the coincidence, which was strengthened by his having, the day before, surprised his uncle in conference with Lady May.

"If you don't like the time, why don't you try shomwhere elsh? why don't you try Longclushe? There'sh a shwell! Two millionsh, if he's worth a pig! A year, or a month, 'twouldn't matter a tizhy to him, and you and him'sh ash thick ash two pickpockets!"

"You're mistaken; I don't choose to have any transactions with Mr. Longcluse."

There was a little pause.

"By-the-by, I saw in some morning paper—I forget which—a day or two ago, a letter attacking Mr. Longcluse for an alleged share in the bank-breaking combination; and there was a short reply from him."

"I know, in the *Timesh*," interposed Levi.

"Yes," said Arden, who, in spite of himself, was always drawn into talk with this fellow more than he intended; such was the force of the ambiguously confidential relations in which he found himself. "What is thought of that in the city?"

"There'sh lotsh of opinionsh about it; not a shafe chap to quar'l with. If you rub Lonclushe thish year, he'll tear you for itsh the next. He'sh a bish—a bish—a bit—bit of a bully, is Lonclushe, and don't alwaysh treat 'ish people fair. If you've quar'led with him, look oush—I shay, look oush!"

"Give me the cheque," said Sir Richard, extending his fingers.

"Pleashe, Shir Richard, accept them billsh," replied Levi, pushing an ink-stand toward him, "and I'll get our cheque for you."

So Mr. Levi took the dip candle and opened one of the safes, displaying for a moment cases of old-fashioned jewelry, and a number of watches. I daresay Mr. Levi and his partner made advances on deposits.

"Why don't you cut them confounded rashesh, Shir Richard? I'm bleshed if I didn't lose five pounds on the Derby, myself! There'sh lotsh of field sportsh," he continued, approaching the table with his cheque-book. "Didn't you never shee a ferret kill a rabbit? It'sh a beautiful thing; it takesh it shomeway down the back, and bit by bit it mendsh itsh grip, moving up to-*wards* the head. It *is* really beautiful, and not a shound from either, only you'll see the rabbitsh big eyes lookin' sho wonderful! and the ferret hangsh on, swinging this way and that like a shna-ake—'tish wery pretty!—till he worksh hish grip up to where the backbone joinsh in with the brain; and then in with itsh teeth, through the shkull! and the rabbit givesh a screech like a child in a fit. Ha, ha, ha! I'm blesht if it ain't done ash clever ash a doctor could do it. 'Twould make you laugh. That will do."

And he took the bills from Sir Richard, and handed him two cheques, and as he placed the bills in the safe, and locked them up, he continued—

"It *ish* uncommon pretty! I'd raythe shee it than a terrier on fifty rats. The rabbit's sho shimple—there'sh the fun of it—and looksh sho foolish; and every rabbit had besht look sharp," he continued, turning about as he put the keys in his pocket, and looking with his burning black eyes full on Sir Richard, "and not let a ferret get a grip anywhere; for if he getsh a good purchase, he'll never let go till he hash his teeth in his brain, and then he'sh off with a shqueak, and there's an end of him."

"I can get notes for one of these cheques to-night?" said Sir Richard.

"The shmall one, yesh, eashy," answered Mr. Levi. "I'm a bachelor," he added jollily, in something like a soliloquy, "and whenever I marry I'll be the better of it; and I'm no muff, and no cove can shay that I ever shplit on no one. And what do I care for Lonclushe? Not the snuff of thish can'le!" And he snuffed the

dip scornfully with his fingers, and flung the sparkling wick over the banister, as he stood at the door, to light Sir Richard down the stairs.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE BARON COMES TO TOWN.

WEEKS flew by. The season was in its last throes: the session was within a day or two of its death. Lady May drove out to Mortlake with a project in her head.

Alice Arden was glad to see her.

"I've travelled all this way," she said, "to make you come with me on Friday to the Abbey."

"On Friday? Why Friday, dear?" answered Alice.

"Because there is to be a grand oratorio of Handel's. It is for the benefit of the clergy's sons' school, and it is one that has not been performed in England for I forget how many years. It is *Saul*. You have heard the Dead

March in Saul, of course; everyone has; but no one has ever heard the oratorio, and come you must. There shall be no one but ourselves—you and I, and your uncle and your brother to take care of us. They have promised to come; and Stentoroni is to take Saul, and they have the finest voices in Europe; and they say that Herr von Waasen, the conductor, is the greatest musician in the world. There have been eight performances in that great room—oh! what do you call it?—while I was away; and now there is only to be this one, and I'm longing to hear it; but I won't go unless you come with me—and you need not dress. It begins at three o'clock, and ends at six, and you can come just as you are now; and an oratorio is really exactly the same as going to church, so you have no earthly excuse; and I'll send out my carriage at one for you; and you'll see, it will do you all the good in the world."

Alice had her difficulties, but Lady May's vigorous onset overpowered them, and at length she consented.

"Does your uncle come out here to see you?" asks Lady May.

"Often; he's very kind," she replies.

"And Grace Maubray?"

"Oh, yes; I see her pretty often—that is, she has been here twice, I think—quite often enough."

"Well, do you know, I never could admire Grace Maubray as I have heard other people do," says Lady May. "There is something harsh and bold, don't you think?—something a little cruel. She is a girl that I don't think could ever be in love."

"I don't know that," says Alice.

"Oh! really?" says Lady May, "and who is it?"

"It is merely a suspicion," says Alice.

"Yes—but you think she likes some one—do, like a darling, tell me who it is," urges Lady May, a little uneasily.

"You must not tell anyone, because they would say it was sisterly vanity, but I think she likes Dick."

"Sir Richard?" says Lady May, with as much indifference as she could.

"Yes, I think she likes my brother."

Lady May smiles painfully.

"I always thought so," she says; "and he admires her, of course?"

"No, I don't think he admires her at all. I'm certain he doesn't," said Alice.

"Well, certainly he always does speak of her as if she belonged to Vivian Darnley," remarks Lady May, more happily.

"So she does, and he to her, I hope," said Alice.

"Hope?" repeated Lady May, interrogatively.

"Yes—I think nothing could be more suitable."

"Perhaps so; you know them better than I do."

"Yes, and I still think Uncle David intends them for one another."

"I would have asked Mr. Longcluse," Lady May begins, after a little interval, "to use his influence to get us good hearing-places, but he is in such disgrace—is he still, or is there any chance of his being forgiven?"

"I told you, darling, I have really nothing to forgive—but I have a kind of fear of Mr. Longcluse—a fear I can't account for. It began, I think, with that affair that seemed to me like a

piece of insanity, and made me angry and bewildered; and then there was a dream, in which I saw such a horrible scene, and fancied he had murdered Richard, and I could not get it out of my head. I suppose I am in a nervous state—and there were other things; and, altogether, I think of him with a kind of horror—and I find that Martha Tansey has an unaccountable dread of him exactly as I have; and even Uncle David says that he has a misgiving about him that he can't get rid of or explain."

"I can't think, however, that he is a ghost or even a malefactor," said Lady May, "or anything worse than a very agreeable, good-natured person. I never knew anything more zealous than his good-nature on the occasion I told you of; and he has always approached you with so much devotion and respect—he seemed to me so sensitive, and to watch your very looks; I really think that a frown from you would have almost killed him."

Alice sighs, and looked wearily through the window, as if the subject bored her; and she said listlessly—

"Oh, yes, he was kind, and gentleman-like,

and sang nicely, I grant you everything; but —but there is something ominous about him, and I hate to hear him mentioned, and with my consent I'll never meet him more."

Connected with the musical venture which the ladies were discussing, a remarkable person visited London. He had a considerable stake in its success. He was a penurious German, reputed wealthy, who ran over from Paris to complete arrangements about ticket-takers and treasurer, so as to ensure a system of check, such as would make it next to impossible for the gentlemen his partners to rob him. This person was the Baron Vanboeren.

Mr. Blount had an intimation of this visit from Paris, and Mr. David Arden invited him to dine, of which invitation he took absolutely no notice; and then Mr. Arden called upon him in his lodging in St. Martin's Lane. There he saw him, this man, possibly the keeper of the secret which he had for twenty years of his life been seeking for. If he had a feudal ideal of this baron, he was disappointed. He beheld a short, thick man, with an enormous head and grizzled hair, coarse pug features, very grimy skin,

and a pair of fierce black eyes, that never rested for a moment, and swept the room from corner to corner with a rapid and unsettled glance that was full of fierce energy.

"The Baron Vanboeren?" inquires Uncle David courteously.

The Baron, who is smoking, nods gruffly.

"My name is Arden—David Arden. I left my card two days ago, and having heard that your stay was but for a few days, I ventured to send you a very hurried invitation."

The Baron grunts and nods again.

"I wrote a note to beg the pleasure of a very short interview, and you have been so good as to admit me."

The Baron smokes on.

"I am told that you possibly are possessed of information which I have long been seeking in vain."

Another nod.

"Monsieur Lebas, the unfortunate little Frenchman who was murdered here in London, was, I believe, in your employment?"

The Baron here had a little fit of coughing.

Uncle David accepted this as an admission.

"He was acquainted with Mr. Longcluse?"

"Was he?" says the Baron, removing and replacing his pipe quickly.

"Will you, Baron Vanboeren, be so good as to give me any information you possess respecting Mr. Longcluse? It is not, I assure you, from mere curiosity I ask these questions, and I hope you will excuse the trouble I give you."

The Baron took his pipe from his mouth, and blew out a thin stream of smoke.

"I have heard," said he, in short, harsh tones, "since I came to London, nosing but good of Mr. Longcluse. I have ze greadest respect for zat excellent gendleman. I will say nosing bud zat—ze greadest respect."

"You knew him in Paris, I believe?" urges Uncle David.

"Nosing but zat—ze greadest respect," repeats the Baron. "I sink him a very worzy gendleman."

"No doubt, but I venture to ask whether you were acquainted with Mr. Longcluse in Paris?"

"Zere are a gread many beoble in Paris. I

have nosing to say of Mr. Longcluse, nosing ad all, only he is a man of high rebudation."

And on completing this sentence the Baron replaced his pipe, and delivered several rapid puffs.

"I took the liberty of enclosing a letter from a friend, explaining who I am, and that the questions I should entreat you to answer are not prompted by any idle or impertinent curiosity; perhaps, then, you would be so good as to say whether you know anything of a person named Yelland Mace, who visited Paris some twenty years since?"

"I am in London, sir, ubon my business, and no one else's. I am sinking of myself, and not about Macé or Longcluse, and I will not speak about eizer of zem. I am well baid for my dime. I will nod waste my dime on dalking—I will nod," he continues, warming as he proceeds; "nosing shall induce me do say one word aboud zoze gendlemen. I dake my oas I'll not, mein Gott! What do you mean by asking me aboud zem?"

He looks positively ferocious as he delivers this expostulation.

"My request must be more unreasonable than it appeared to me."

"Nosing can be more unreasonable!"

"And I am to understand that you positively object to giving me any information respecting the persons I have named?"

The Baron appeared extremely uneasy. He trotted to the door on his short legs, and looked out. Returning, he shut the door carefully. His grimy countenance, under the action of fear, assumes an expression peculiarly forbidding: and he said, with angry volubility—

"Zis visit must end, sir, zis moment. Donnerwesser! I will nod be combromised by you. But if you bromise as a Christian, ubon your honour, never to mention what I say——"

"Never, upon my honour."

"Nor to say you have talked with me here, in London——"

"Never."

"I will tell you that I have no objection to sbeak wis you, *privately* in Paris, whenever you are zere—now, now! zat is all. I will not have one ozer word—you shall not stay one ozer minude."

He opens the door and wags his head peremptorily, and points with his pipe to the lobby.

"You'll not forget your promise, Baron, when I call? for visit you I will."

"I never forget nosing. Monsieur Arden, will you go or *nod*?"

"Farewell, sir," says his visitor, too much excited by the promise opened to him, for the moment to apprehend what was ridiculous in the scene or in the brutality of the Baron.

## CHAPTER V.

### TWO OLD FRIENDS MEET AND PART.

WHEN he was gone the Baron Vanboeren sat down and panted; his pipe had gone out, and he clutched it in his hand like a weapon and continued for some minutes, in the good old phrase, very much disordered.

"That old fool," he mutters, in his native German, "won't come near me again while I remain in London."

This assurance was, I suppose, consolatory, for the Baron repeated it several times; and then bounced to his feet, and made a few hurried preparations for an appearance in the streets. He put on a short cloak which had served him for the last thirty years, and a preposterous hat; and with a thick stick in his

hand, and a cigar lighted, sallied forth, square and short, to make Mr. Longcluse a visit by appointment.

By this time the lamps were lighted. There had been a performance of *Saul*, a very brilliant success, although it pleased the Baron to grumble over it that day. He had not returned from the great room where it had taken place more than an hour, when David Arden had paid his brief visit. He was now hastening to an interview which he thought much more momentous. Few persons who looked at that vulgar seedy figure, strutting through the mud, would have thought that the thread-bare black cloak, over which a brown autumnal tint had spread, and the monstrous battered felt hat, in which a costermonger would scarcely have gone abroad, covered a man worth a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

Man is mysteriously so constructed that he cannot abandon himself to selfishness, which is the very reverse of heavenly love, without in the end contracting some incurable insanity; and that insanity of the higher man constitutes, to a great extent, his mental death. The Baron

Vanboeren's insanity was avarice; and his solitary expenses caused him all the sordid anxieties which haunt the unfortunate gentleman who must make both ends meet on five-and-thirty pounds a year.

Though not *sui profusus*, he was *alieni appetens* in a very high degree; and his visit to Mr. Longcluse was not one of mere affection.

Mr. Longcluse was at home in his study. The Baron was instantly shown in. Mr. Longcluse, smiling, with both hands extended to grasp his, advances to meet him.

"My dear baron, what an unexpected pleasure! I could scarcely believe my eyes when I read your note. So you have a stake in this musical speculation, and though it is very late, and, of course, everything at a disadvantage, I have to congratulate you on an immense success."

The Baron shrugs, shakes his head, and rolls his eyes dismally.

"Ah, my friend, ze exbenses are enormous."

"And the receipts still more so," says Longcluse cheerfully; "you must be making, among you, a mint of money."

"Ah! Monsieur Longcluse, id is nod what it should be; zay are all such sieves and robbers! I will never escape under a loss of a sousand bounds."

"You must be cheerful, my dear baron. You shall dine with me to-day. I'll take you with me to half a dozen places of amusement worth seeing after dinner. To-morrow morning you shall run down with me to Brighton—my yacht is there—and when you have had enough of that, we shall run up again and have a white-bait dinner at Greenwich; and come into town and see those fellows, Markham and the other, that poor little Lebas saw play, the night he was murdered. You must see them play the return match, so long postponed. Next day we shall——"

"Bardon, monsieur, bardon! I am doo old. I have no spirits."

"What, not enough to see a game of billiards between Markham and Hood! Why, Lebas was charmed so far as he saw it, poor fellow, with their play."

"No, no, no, no, monsieur; a sousand sanks, no, bardon, I cannod," says the Baron. "I do

not like billiards, and your friends have not found it a lucky game."

"Well, if you don't care for billiards, we'll find something else," replies hospitable Mr. Longcluse.

"Nosing else, nosing else," answers the Baron hastily. "I hade all zese sings, ze seatres, ze bubbedshows, and all ze ozer amusements, I give you my oas. Did you read my liddle node?"

"I did indeed, and it amused me beyond measure," says Longcluse joyously.

"Amuse!" repeats the Baron, "how so?"

"Because it is so diverting; one might almost fancy it was meant to ask me for fifteen hundred pounds."

"I have lost, by zis sing, a vast deal more zan zat."

"And, my dear Baron, what on earth have I to do with that?"

"I am an old friend, a good friend, a true friend," says the Baron, while his fierce little eyes sweep the walls, from corner to corner, with quivering rapidity. "You would not like to see me quide in a corner. You're the rich-

est man in England, almost; what's one sousand five hundred to you? I have not wridden to you, or come to England, dill now. You have done nosing for your old friend yet: what are you going to give him?"

"Not as much as I gave Lebas," said Longcluse, eyeing him askance, with a smile.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Not a napoleon, not a franc, not a sou."

"You are jesding; sink, sink, sink, monsieur, what a friend I have been and *am* to you."

"So I do, my dear Baron, and consider how I show my gratitude. Have I ever given a hint to the French police about the identity of the clever gentleman who managed the little tunnel through which a river of champagne flowed into Paris, under the barrier, duty free? Have I ever said a word about the confiscated jewels of the Marchioness de la Sarnierre? Have I ever asked how the Comte de Loubourg's little boy is, or directed an unfriendly eye upon the conscientious physician who extricates ladies and gentlemen from the consequences of late hours, nervous depression, and fifty other things that war against good diges-

tion and sound sleep? Come, come, my good baron, whenever we come to square accounts, the balance will stand very heavily in my favour. I don't want to press for a settlement, but if you urge it, by Heaven, I'll make you pay the uttermost farthing!"

Longcluse laughs cynically. The Baron looks very angry. His face darkens to a leaden hue. The fingers which he plunged into his snuff-box are trembling. He takes two or three great pinches of snuff before speaking.

Mr. Longcluse watches all these symptoms of his state of mind with a sardonic enjoyment, beneath which, perhaps, is the sort of suspense with which a beast-tamer watches the eye of the animal whose fury he excites only to exhibit the coercion which he exercises through its fears, and who is for a moment doubtful whether its terrors or its fury may prevail.

The Baron's restless eyes roll wickedly. He puts his hand into his pocket irresolutely, and crumbles some papers there. There was no knowing, for some seconds, what turn things might take. But if he had for a moment medi-

tated a crisis, he thought better of it. He breaks into a fierce laugh, and extends his hand to Mr. Longcluse, who as frankly places his own in it, and the Baron shakes it vehemently. And Mr. Longcluse and he laugh boisterously and oddly together. The Baron takes another great pinch of snuff, and then he says, sponging out as it were, as an ignored parenthesis, the critical part of their conversation—

"No, no, I sink not; no, no, surely not. I am not fit for all zose amusements. I cannot knog aboud as I used; an old fellow, you know: beace and tranquillidy. No, I cannot dine with you. I dine with Stentoroni to-morrow; to-day I have dined with our *tenore*. How well you look! What nose, what tees, what chin! I am proud of you. We bart good friends, *bon soir*, Monsieur Longcluse, farewell. I am already a liddle lade."

"Farewell, dear Baron. How can I thank you enough for this kind meeting? Try one of my cigars as you go home."

The Baron, not being a proud man, took half-a-dozen, and with a final shaking of hands these merry gentlemen parted, and Longcluse's

door closed for ever on the Baron Vanboeren.

"That bloated spider?" mused Mr. Longcluse. "How many flies has he sucked! It is another matter when spiders take to catching wasps."

Every man of energetic passions has within him a principle of self-destruction. Longcluse had his. It had expressed itself in his passion for Alice Arden. That passion had undergone a wondrous change, but it was imperishable in its new as in its pristine state.

This gentleman was in the dumps so soon as he was left alone. Always uncertainty; always the sword of Damocles; always the little reminders of perditiou, each one contemptible, but each one in succession touching the same set of nerves, and like the fall of the drop of water in the inquisition, *non vi, sed sæpe cadendo*, gradually heightening monotony into excitement, and excitement into frenzy. Living always with a sense of the unreality of life and the vicinity of death, with a certain stern tremor of the heart, like that of a man going into action, no wonder if he sometimes sickened of his bargain with Fate, and thought life pur-

chased too dear on the terms of such a lease.

Longcluse bolted his door, unlocked his desk, and there what do we see? Six or seven miniatures—two enamels, the rest on ivory—all by different hands; some English, some Parisian; very exquisite, some of them. Every one was Alice Arden. Little did she dream that such a gallery existed. How were they taken? Photographs are the colourless phantoms from which these glowing life-like beauties start. Tender-hearted Lady May has in confidence given him, from time to time, several of these from her album; he has induced foreign artists to visit London, and managed opportunities by which, at parties, in theatres, and I am sorry to say even in church, these clever persons succeeded in studying from the life, and learning all the tints which now glow before him. If I had mentioned what this little collection cost him, you would have opened your eyes. The Baron Vanboeren would have laughed and cursed him with hilarious derision, and a money-getting Christian would have been quite horror-struck, on reading the scandalous row of figures.

Each miniature he takes in turn, and looks at

for a long time, holding it in both hands, his hands resting on the desk, his face inclined and sad, as if looking down into the coffin of his darling. One after the other he puts them by, and returns to his favourite one; and at last he shuts it up also, with a snap, and places it with the rest in the dark, under lock and key.

He leaned back and laid his thin hand across his eyes. Was he looking at an image that came out in the dark on the retina of memory? Or was he shedding tears?

## CHAPTER VI.

### "SAUL."

THE day arrived on which Alice Arden had agreed to go with Lady May to Westminster Abbey, to hear the masterly performance of *Saul*. When it came to the point, she would have preferred staying at home; but that was out of the question. Every one has experienced that ominous foreboding which overcomes us sometimes with a shapeless forecasting of evil. It was with that vague misgiving that she had all the morning looked forward to her drive to town, and the long-promised oratorio. It was a dark day, and there was a thunderous weight in the air, and the melancholy atmosphere deepened her gloom.

Her Uncle David arrived in Lady May's car-

riage, to take care of her. They were to call at Lady May's house, where its mistress and Sir Richard Arden awaited them.

A few kind words followed Uncle David's affectionate greeting, as they drove into town. He did not observe that Alice was unusually low. He seemed to have something not very pleasant himself to think upon, and he became silent for some time.

"I want," said he at last, looking up suddenly, "to give you a little advice, and now mind what I say. Don't sign any legal paper without consulting me, and don't make any promise to Richard. It is just possible—I hope he may not, but it is just possible—that he may ask you to deal in his favour with your charge on the Yorkshire estate. Do you tell him, if he should, that you have promised me faithfully not to do anything in the matter, except as I shall advise. He may, as I said, never say a word on the subject, but in any case my advice will do you no harm. I have had bitter experience, my dear, of which I begin to grow rather ashamed, of the futility of trying to assist Richard. I have thrown away a great deal of money upon

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Her Uncle David arrived in Lady May's car-

haps the finest preparation for the wondrous harmonies to come.

And now the grand and unearthly oratorio has commenced. Each person in our little group hears it with different ears. I wonder whether any two persons in that vast assembly heard it precisely alike. Sir Richard Arden, having many things to think about, hears it intermittently as he would have listened to a bore, and with a secret impatience. Lady May hears it not much better, but felt as if she could have sat there for ever. Old David Arden enjoyed music, and is profoundly delighted with this. But his thoughts also begin to wander, for as the mighty basso singing the part of Saul delivers the words,

> "I would that, by thy art, thou bring me up
> The man whom I shall name,"

David Arden's eye lighted, with a little shock, upon the enormous head and repulsive features of the Baron Vanboeren. What a mask for a witch! The travesti lost its touch of the ludicrous, in Uncle David's eye, by virtue of the awful interest he felt in the possible revelations of that ugly magician, who could, he fancied, by a

word call up the image of Yelland Mace. The Baron is sitting about ten steps in front of him, face to face. He wonders he has not seen him till now. His head is a little thrown back, displaying his short bull neck. His restless eyes are fixed now in a sullen reverie. His calculation as to the exact money value of the audience is over; he is polling them no longer, and his unresting brain is projecting pictures into the darkness of the future.

His face in a state of apathy was ill-favoured and wicked, and now lighted with a cadaverous effect, by the dull purplish halo which marks the blending of the feeble daylight, with the glow of the lamp that is above him.

The Baron had seen and recognized David Arden, and a train of thoughts horribly incongruous with the sacred place was moving through his brain. As he looks on, impassive, the great basso rings out—

"If heaven denies thee aid, seek it from hell."

And the soprano sends forth the answering incantation, wild and piercing—

"Infernal spirits, by whose power
Departed ghosts in living forms appear,
Add horror to the midnight hour,
And chill the boldest hearts with fear;
To this stranger's wondering eyes
Let the man he calls for rise."

If Mr. Longcluse had been near, he might have made his own sad application of the air so powerfully sung by the alto to whom was committed the part of David—

"Such haughty beauties rather move
Aversion, than engage our love."

He might with an undivulged anguish have heard the adoring strain—

"O lovely maid! thy form beheld
Above all beauty charms our eyes,
Yet still within that form concealed,
Thy mind a greater beauty lies."

In a rapture Alice listened on. The famous "Dead March" followed, interposing its melancholy instrumentation, and arresting the vocal action of the drama by the pomp of that magnificent dirge.

To her the whole thing seemed stupendous, unearthly, glorious beyond expression. She almost trembled with excitement. She was

glad she had come. Tears of ecstasy were in her eyes.

And now, at length, the three parts are over, and the crowd begin to move outward. The organ peals as they shuffle slowly along, checked every minute, and then again resuming their slow progress, pushing on in those little shuffling steps of two or three inches by which well-packed crowds get along, every one wondering why they can't all step out together, and what the people in front can be about.

In two several channels, through two distinct doors, this great human reservoir floods out. Sir Richard has undertaken the task of finding Lady May's carriage, and bringing it to a point where they might escape the tedious waiting at the door; and David Arden, with Lady May on one arm and Alice on the other, is getting on slowly in the thick of this well-dressed and aristocratic mob.

"I think, Alice," said Uncle David, "you would be more out of the crush, and less likely to lose me, if you were to get quite close behind us—do you see?—between Lady May and me, and hold me fast."

The pressure of the stream was so unequal, and a front of three so wide, that Alice gladly adopted the new arrangement, and with her hand on her uncle's arm, felt safer and more comfortable than before.

This slow march, inch by inch, is strangely interrupted. A well-known voice, close to her ear, says—

"Miss Arden, a word with you."

A pale face, with flat nose and Mephistophelian eyebrows, was stooping near her. Mr. Longcluse's thin lips were close to her ear. She started a little aside, and tried to stop. Recovering, she stretched her hand to reach her uncle, and found that there were strangers between them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A WAKING DREAM.

THERE is something in that pale face and spectral smile that fascinates the terrified girl; she cannot take her eyes off him. His dark eyes are near hers; his lips are still close to her; his arm is touching her dress; he leans his face to her, and talks on, in an icy tone little above a whisper, and an articulation so sharply distinct that it seems to pain her ear.

"The oratorio!" he continued: "the music! The words, here and there, are queer—a little sinister—eh? There are better words and wilder music—you shall hear them some day! Saul had his evil spirit, and a bad family have theirs—ay, they have a demon who is always near, and shapes their lives for them; they don't

know it, but, sooner or later justice catches them. Suppose *I* am the demon of *your* family —it is very funny, isn't it? I tried to serve you both, but it wouldn't do. I'll set about the other thing now: the evil genius of a bad family; I'm appointed to that. It almost makes me laugh—such cross-purposes! You're frightened? That's a pity; you should have thought of that before. It requires some nerve to fight a man like me. I don't threaten you, mind, but you are frightened. There is such a thing as getting a dangerous fellow bound over to keep the peace. Try that. I should like to have a talk with you before his worship in the police-court, across the table, with a corps of clever newspaper reporters sitting there. What fun in the *Times* and all the rest next morning."

It is plain to Miss Arden that Mr. Longcluse is speaking all this time with suppressed fury, and his countenance expresses a sort of smiling hatred that horrifies her.

"I'm not bad at speaking my mind," he continues. "It is unfortunate that I am so well thought of and listened to in London. Yes, people mind what I say a good deal. I rather

think they'll choose to believe *my* story. But there's another way, if you don't like that. Your brother's not afraid—*he*'ll protect you. Tell your brother what a miscreant I am, and send him to me—do, pray! Nothing on earth I should like better than to have a talk with that young gentleman. Do, pray, send him, I entreat. He'd like satisfaction—ha! ha!—and, by Heaven, I'll give it him! Tell him to get his pistols ready; he shall have his shot! Let him come to Boulogne, or where he likes—I'll stand it—and I don't think he'll need to pay his way back again. He'll stay in France; he'll not walk in at your hall-door, and call for luncheon, I promise you. Ha! ha! ha!"

This pale man enjoys her terror cruelly.

"I'm not worthy to speak to you, I believe—eh? That's odd, for the time isn't far off when you'll pray to God I may have mercy on you. You had no business to encourage me. I'm afraid the crowd is getting on very slowly, but I'll try to entertain you: you *are* such a good listener!"

Miss Arden often wondered afterwards at her own passiveness through all this. There were,

no doubt, close by, many worthy citizens, fathers of families, who would have taken her for a few minutes under their protection with honest alacrity. But it was a fascination; her state was cataleptic: and she could no more escape than the bird that is throbbing in the gaze of a snake. The cold murmur went distinctly on and on:

"Your brother will probably think I should treat you more ceremoniously. Don't you agree with him? Pray, do complain to him. Pray, send him to me, and I'll thank him for his share in this matter. He wanted to make it a match between us—I'm speaking coarsely, for the sake of distinctness—till a title turned up. What has become of the title, by-the-by?—I don't see him here. The peer wasn't in the running, after all: didn't even start! Ha! ha! ha! Remember me to your brother, pray, and tell him the day will come when he'll not need to be reminded of me: I'll take care of that. And so Sir Richard is doomed to disappointment! It is a world of disappointment. The Earl is nowhere! And the proudest family on earth—what is left of it—looks a little foolish. And

well it may: it has many follies to expiate. You had no business encouraging me, and you are foolish enough to be terribly afraid now—ha! ha! ha! Too late, eh? I dare say you think I'll punish you! Not I: nothing of the sort! I'll never punish any one. Why should I take that trouble about you? Not I: not even your brother. Fate does that. Fate has always been kind to me, and hit my enemies pretty hard. You had no business encouraging me. Remember this: the day is not far off when you will *both* rue the hour you threw me over!"

She is gazing helplessly into that dreadful face. There is a cruel elation in it. He looks on her, I think, with admiration. Mixed with his hatred, did there remain a fraction of love?

On a sudden the voice, which was the only sound she heard, was in her ear no longer. The face which had transfixed her gaze was gone. Longcluse had apparently pushed a way for her to her friends, for she found herself again next her Uncle David. Holding his arm fast, she looked round quickly for moment: she saw Mr. Longcluse nowhere. She felt on the point of

fainting. The scene must have lasted a shorter time than she supposed, for her uncle had not missed her.

"My dear, how pale you look! Are you tired?" exclaims Lady May, when they have come to a halt at the door.

"Yes, indeed, so she does. Are you ill, dear?" added her uncle.

"No, nothing, thanks, only the crowd. I shall be better immediately." And so waiting in the air, near the door, they were soon joined by Sir Richard, and in his carriage he and she drove home to Mortlake. Lady May, taking hers, went to a tea at old Lady Elverstone's; and David Arden, bidding them good-bye, walked homeward across the park.

Richard had promised to spend the evening at Mortlake with her, and side by side they were driving out to that sad and sombre scene. As they entered the shaded road upon which the great gate of Mortlake opens, the setting sun streamed through the trunks of the trees, and tinted the [illegible] with a subdued splen-

[illegible] Alice, why you *will*

stay here. It is enough to kill you," says Sir Richard, looking out peevishly on the picturesque woodlands of Mortlake, and interrupting a long silence. "You never can recover your spirits while you stay here. There is Lady May going all over the world—I forget where, but she will be at Naples—and she absolutely longs to take you with her; and you won't go! I really sometimes think you want to make yourself melancholy mad."

"I don't know," said she, waking herself from a reverie in which, against the dark background of the empty arches she had left, she still saw the white, wicked face that had leaned over her, and heard the low murmured stream of insult and menace. "I'm not sure that I should not be worse anywhere else. I don't feel energy to make a change. I can't bear the idea of meeting people. By-and-by, in a little time, it will be different. For the present quiet is what I like best. But you, Dick, are not looking well, you seem so over-worked and anxious. You really do want a little holiday. Why don't you go to Scotland to shoot, or take a few weeks'

yachting? All your business must be pretty well settled now."

"It will never be settled," he said, a little sourly. "I assure you there never was property in such a mess—I mean leases and everything. Such drudgery, you have no idea; and I owe a good deal. It has not done me any good. I'd rather be as I was before that miserable Derby. I'd gladly exchange it all for a clear annuity of a thousand a year."

"Oh! my dear Dick, you can't mean that! All the northern property, and this, and Morley?"

"I hate to talk about it. I'm tired of it already. I have been so unlucky, so foolish, and if I had not found a very good friend, I should have been utterly ruined by that cursed race; and he has been aiding me very generously, on rather easy terms, in some difficulties that have followed; and you know I had to raise money on the estate before all this happened, and have had to make a very heavy mortgage, and I am getting into such a mess—a confusion, I mean—and really I should have sold the estates, if it had not been for my unknown friend, for I don't know his name."

"What friend?"

"The friend who has aided me through my troubles—the best friend I ever met, unless it be as I half suspect. Has anyone spoken to you lately, in a way to lead you to suppose that he, or anyone else among our friends, has been lending me a helping hand?"

"Yes, as we were driving into town to-day, Uncle David told me so distinctly; but I am not sure that I ought to have mentioned it. I fancy, indeed," she added, as she remembered the reflections with which it was accompanied, "that he meant it as a secret, so you must not get me into disgrace with him by appearing to know more than he has told you himself."

"No, certainly," said Richard; "and he said it was he who lent it?"

"Yes, distinctly."

"Well, I all but knew it before. Of course it is very kind of him, But then, you know, he is very wealthy; he does not feel it; and he would not for the world that our house should lose its position. I think he would rather sell the coat off his back, than that our name should be slurred."

Sir Richard was pleased that he had received this light in corroboration of his suspicions. He was glad to have ascertained that the powerful motives which he had conjectured were actually governing the conduct of David Arden, although for obvious reasons he did not choose that his nephew should be aware of his weakness.

The carriage drew up at the hall-door. The old house, in the evening beams, looked warm and cheery, and from every window in its broad front flamed the reflection which showed like so many hospitable winter fires.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### LOVE AND PLAY.

"HERE we are, Alice," says Sir Richard, as they enter the hall. "We'll have a good talk this evening. We'll make the best of everything; and I don't see, if Uncle David chooses to prevent it, why the old ship should founder, after all."

They are now in the house. It is hard to get rid of the sense of constraint that, in his father's time, he always experienced within those walls; to feel that the old influence is exorcised and utterly gone, and that he is himself absolute master where so lately he hardly ventured to move on tip-toe.

They did not talk so much as Sir Richard had anticipated. There were upon his mind some

things that weighed heavily. He had got from Levi a list of the advances made by his luckily-found friend, and the total was much heavier than he had expected. He began to fear that he might possibly exceed the limits which his uncle must certainly have placed somewhere. He might not, indeed, allow him to suffer the indignity of a bankruptcy; but he would take a very short and unpleasant course with him. He would seize his rents, and, with a friendly roughness, put his estates to nurse, and send the prodigal on a Childe Harold's pilgrimage of five or six years, with an allowance, perhaps, of some three hundred a year, which, in his frugal estimate of a young man's expenditure, would be handsome.

While he was occupied in these ruminations, Alice cared not to break the silence. It was a very unsociable *tête-à-tête*. Alice had a secret of her own to brood over. If anything could have made Longcluse now more terrible to her imagination, it would have been a risk of her brother's knowing anything of the language he had dared to hold to her. She knew, from her brother's own lips, that he was a duellist; and

she was also persuaded that Mr. Longcluse was, in his own playful and sinister phrase, very literally a "miscreant." His face, ever since that interview, was always at her right side, with its cruel pallor, and the vindictive sarcasm of lip and tone. How she wished that she had never met that mysterious man! What she would have given to be exempted from his hatred, and blotted from his remembrance!"

One object only was in her mind, distinctly, with respect to that person. She was, thank God, quite beyond his power. But men, she knew, live necessarily a life so public, and have so many points of contact, that better opportunities present themselves for the indulgence of a masculine grudge; and she trembled at the thought of a collision. Why, then, should not Dick seek a reconciliation with him, and, by any honourable means, abate that terrible enmity.

"I have been thinking, Dick, that, as Uncle David makes the interest he takes in your affairs a secret, and you can't consult him, it would be very well indeed if you could find some one else

able to advise, who would consult with you when you wished."

"Of course, I should be only too glad," says Sir Richard, yawning and smiling as well as he could at the same time; "but an adviser one can depend on in such matters, my dear child, is not to be picked up every day."

"Poor papa, I think, was very wise in choosing people of that kind. Uncle David, I know, said that he made wonderfully good bargains about his mortgages, or whatever they are called."

"I dare say—I don't know—he was always complaining, and always changing them," says Sir Richard. "But if you can introduce me to a person who can disentangle all my complications, and take half my cares off my shoulders, I'll say you are a very wise little woman indeed."

"I only know this—that poor papa had the highest opinion of Mr. Longcluse, and thought he was the cleverest person, and the most able to assist, of any one he knew."

Sir Richard Arden hears this with a stare of surprise.

"My dear Alice, you seem to forget everything. Why, Longcluse and I are at deadly feud. He hates me implacably. There never could be anything but enmity between us. Not that I care enough about *him* to hate him, but I have the worst opinion of him. I have heard the most shocking stories about him lately. They insinuate that he committed a murder! I told you of that jealousy and disappointment, about a girl he was in love with and wanted to marry, and it ended in *murder!* I'm told he had the reputation of being a most unscrupulous villain. They say he was engaged in several conspiracies to pigeon young fellows. He was the utter ruin, they say, of young Thornley, the poor muff who shot himself some years ago; and he was thought to be a principal proprietor of that gaming-house in Vienna, where they found all the apparatus for cheating so cleverly contrived."

"But are any of these things proved?" urges Miss Arden.

"I don't suppose he would be at large if they were," says Sir Richard, with a smile. "I only know that I believe them."

"Well, Dick, you know I reminded you before—you used not to believe those stories till you quarrelled with him."

"Why, what do you want, Alice?" he exclaims, looking hard at her. "What on earth can you mean? And what can possibly make you take an interest in the character of such a ruffian?"

Alice's face grew pale under his gaze. She cleared her voice and looked down; and then she looked full at him, with burning eyes, and said—

"It is because I am afraid of him, and think he may do you some dreadful injury, unless you are again on terms with him. I can't get it out of my head; and I dare say I am wrong, but I am sure I am miserable."

She burst into tears.

"Why, you darling little fool, what harm can he do me?" said Richard fondly, throwing his arms about her neck and kissing her, as he laughed tenderly. "He exhausted his utmost malice when he angrily refused to lend me a shilling in my extremity, or to be of the smallest use to me, at a moment when he might have

saved me, without risk to himself, by simply willing it. *I* didn't ask him, you may be sure. An officious, foolish little friend, doing all, of course, for the best, *did*, without once consulting me, or giving me a voice in the matter, until he had effectually put his foot in it, as I told you. I would not for anything on earth have applied to him, I need not tell you; but it was done, and it only shows with what delight he would have seen me ruined, as, in fact, I should have been, had not my own relations taken the matter up. I do believe, Alice, the best thing I could do for myself and for you would be to marry," he says, a little suddenly, after a considerable silence.

Alice looks at him, doubtful whether he is serious.

"I really mean it. It is the only honest way of making or mending a fortune now-a-days."

"Well, Dick, it is time enough to think of that by-and-by, don't you think?"

"Perhaps so; I hope so. At present it seems to me that, as far as I am concerned, it is just a race between the bishop and the bailiff which shall have me first. If any lady is good enough

to hold out a hand to a poor drowning fellow, she had better——"

"Take care, Dick, that the poor drowning fellow does not pull her in. Don't you think it would be well to consider first what you have got to live on?"

"I have plenty to live on; I know that exactly," said Dick.

"What is it?"

"My wife's fortune."

"You are never serious for a minute, Dick! Don't you think it would be better first to get matters a little into order, so as to know distinctly what you are worth?"

"Quite the contrary; she'd rather not know. She'd rather exercise her imagination than learn distinctly what I am worth. Any woman of sense would prefer marrying me so."

"I don't understand you."

"Why, if I succeed in making matters quite lucid, I don't think she would marry me at all. Isn't it better to say, 'My Angelina,' or whatever else it may be, 'you see before you Sir Richard Arden, who has estates in Yorkshire, in Middlesex, and in Devonshire, thus spanning

all England from north to south. We had these estates at the Conquest. There is nothing modern about them but the mortgages. I have never been able to ascertain exactly what they bring in by way of rents, or pay out by way of interest. That I stand here, with flesh upon my bones, and pretty well-made clothes, I hope, upon both, is evidence in a confused way that an English gentleman—a baronet—can subsist upon them; and this magnificent muddle I lay at your feet with the devotion of a passionate admirer of your personal—property!' That, I say, is better than appearing with a balance-sheet in your hand, and saying, 'Madam, I propose marrying you, and I beg to present you with a balance-sheet of the incomings and outgoings of my estates, the intense clearness of which will, I hope, compensate for the nature of its disclosures. I am there shown in the most satisfactory detail to be worth exactly fifteen shillings per annum, and how unlimited is my credit will appear from the immense amount and variety of my debts. In pressing my suit I rely entirely upon your love of perspicuity and your passion for arithmetic,

which will find in the ledgers of my steward an almost inexhaustible gratification and indulgence.' However, as you say, Alice, I have time to look about me, and I see you are tired. We'll talk it over to-morrow morning at breakfast. Don't think I have made up my mind; I'll do exactly whatever you like best. But get to your bed, you poor little soul; you do look so tired!"

With great affection they parted for the night. But Sir Richard did not meet her at breakfast.

After she had left the room some time, he changed his mind, left a message for his sister with old Crozier, ordered his servant and trap to the door, and drove into 'town. It was not his good angel who prompted him. He drove to a place where he was sure to find high play going on, and there luck did not favour him.

What had become of Sir Richard Arden's resolutions? The fascinations of his old vice were irresistible. The ring of the dice, the whirl of the roulette, the plodding pillage of whist—any rite acknowledged by Fortune, the

goddess of his soul, was welcome to that keen worshipper. Luck was not always adverse; once or twice he might have retreated in comparative safety; but the temptation to "back his luck" and go on prevailed, and left him where he was.

About a week after the evening passed at Mortlake, a black and awful night of disaster befel him.

Every other extravagance and vice draws its victim on at a regulated pace, but this of gaming is an hourly trifling with life, and one infatuated moment may end him. How short had been the reign of the new baronet, and where were prince and princedom now?

Before five o'clock in the morning, he had twice spent a quarter of an hour tugging at Mr. Levi's office-bell, in the dismal old street in Westminster. Then he drove off toward his lodgings. The roulette was whirling under his eyes whenever for a moment he closed them. He thought he was going mad.

The cabman knew a place where, even at that unseasonable hour, he might have a warm bath; and thither Sir Richard ordered him to

drive. After this, he again essayed the Jew's office. The cool early morning was over still quiet London—hardly a soul was stirring. On the steps he waited, pulling the office-bell at intervals. In the stillness of the morning, he could hear it distinctly in the remote room, ringing unheeded in that capacious house.

## CHAPTER IX.

### PLANS.

IT was, of course, in vain looking for Mr. Levi there at such an hour. Sir Richard Arden fancied that he had, perhaps, a sleeping-room in the house, and on that chance tried what his protracted alarm might do.

Then he drove to his own house. He had a latch-key, and let himself in. Just as he is, he throws himself into a chair in his dressing-room. He knows there is no use in getting into his bed. In his fatigued state, sleep was quite out of the question. That proud young man was longing to open his heart to the mean, cruel little Jew.

Oh, madness! why had he broken with his masterly and powerful friend, Longcluse? Quite

unavailing now, his repentance. They had spoken and passed like ships at sea, in this wide life, and now who could count the miles and billows between them? Never to cross or come in sight again!

Uncle David? Yes, he might go to him; he might spread out the broad evidences of his ruin before him, and adjure him, by the God of mercy, to save him from the great public disgrace that was now imminent; implore of him to give him any pittance he pleased, to subsist on in exile, and to deal with the estates as he himself thought best. But Uncle David was away, quite out of reach. After his whimsical and inflexible custom, lest business should track him in his holiday, he had left no address with his man of business, who only knew that his first destination was Scotland; none with Grace Maubray, who only knew that, attended by Vivian Darnley, she and Lady May were to meet him in about a fortnight on the Continent, where they were to plan together a little excursion in Switzerland or Italy.

Sir Richard quite forgot there was such a meal as breakfast. He ordered his horse to the door,

took a furious two hours' ride beyond Brompton, and returned and saw Levi at his office, at his usual hour, eleven o'clock. The Jew was alone. His large lowering eyes were cast on Sir Richard as he entered and approached.

"Look, now; listen," says Sir Richard, who looks wofully wild and pale, and as he seats himself never takes his eyes off Mr. Levi. "I don't care very much who knows it—I think I'm totally *ruined*."

The Jew knows pretty well all about it, but he stares and gapes hypocritically in the face of his visitor as if he were thunderstruck, and he speaks never a word. I suppose he thought it as well, for the sake of brevity and clearness, to allow his client "to let off the shteam" first, a process which Sir Richard forthwith commenced, with both hands on the table—sometimes clenched, sometimes expanded, sometimes with a thump, by blowing off a cloud of oaths and curses, and incoherent expositions of the wrongs and perversities of fortune.

"I don't think I can tell you how much it is. I don't know," says Sir Richard bleakly, in reply to a pertinent question of the Jew's. "There

was that rich fellow, what's his name, that makes candles—he's always winning. By Jove, what a thing luck is! He won—I know it is more than two thousand. I gave him I O U's for it. He'd be very glad, of course, to know me, curse him! I don't care, now, who does. And he'd let me owe him twice as much, for as long as I like. I dare say, only too glad—as smooth as one of his own filthy candles. And there were three fellows lending money there. I don't know how much I got—I was stupid. I signed whatever they put before me. Those things can't stand, by heavens; the Chancellor will set them all aside. The confounded villains! What's the Government doing? What's the Government about, I say? Why don't Parliament interfere, to smash those cursed nests of robbers and swindlers? Here I am, utterly robbed—I know I'm *robbed*—and all by that cursed temptation; and—and—and I don't know what cash I got, nor what I have put my name to!"

"I'll make out that in an hour's time. They'll tell me at the houshe who the shentleman wazh."

"And—upon my soul that's true—I owe the people there something too; it can't be much—it isn't much. And, Levi, like a good fellow—by Heaven, I'll *never* forget it to you, if you'll think of something. You've pulled me through so often; I am sure there's good-nature in you; you wouldn't see a fellow you've known so long driven to the wall and made a beggar of, without—without thinking of something."

Levi looked down, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled to himself, and Sir Richard gazed on his vulgar features as if his life or death depended upon every variation of their expression.

"You know," says Levi, looking up and swaying his shoulders a little, "the old chap can't do no more. He's taken a share in that Austrian contract, and he'll want his capital, every pig. I told you lasht time. Wouldn't Lonclushe give you a lift?"

"Not he. He'd rather give me a shove under."

"Well, they tell me you and him wazh very thick; and your uncle'sh man, Blount, knowshe him, and can just ashk him, from himself, mind, not from you."

"For money?" exclaimed Richard.

"Not at a—all," drawled the Jew impatiently. "Lishen—mind. The old fellow, your friend——"

"He's out of town," interrupted Richard.

"No, he'sh not. I shaw him lasht night. You're a—all wrong. He'sh not Mr. David Harden, if that'sh what you mean. He'sh a better friend, and he'll leave you a lot of tin when he diesh—an old friend of the family—and if all goeshe shmooth he'll come and have a talk with you fashe to fashe, and tell you all his plansh about you, before a week'sh over. But he'll be at hish lasht pound for five or six weeksh to come, till the firsht half-million of the new shtock is in the market; and he shaid, 'I can't draw out a pound of my balanshe, but if he can get Lonclushe's na—ame, I'll get him any shum he wantsh, and bear Lonclushe harmlesh."

"I don't think I can," said Sir Richard; "I can't be quite sure, though. It is just possible he might."

"Well, let Blount try," said he.

There was another idea also in Mr. Levi's head. He had been thinking whether the situ-

ation might not be turned to some more profitable account, for him, than the barren agency for the "friend of the family," who "lent out money gratis," like Antonio; and if he did not "bring down the rate of usance," at all events, deprived the Shylocks of London, in one instance at least, of their fair game.

"If he won't do that, there'sh but one chansh left."

"What is that?" asked Sir Richard, with a secret flutter at his heart. It was awful to think of himself reduced to his last chance, with his recent experience of what a chance is.

"Well," says Mr. Levi, scrawling florid capitals on the table with his office pen, and speaking with much deliberation, "I heard you were going to make a very rich match; and if the shettlementsh was agreed on, I don't know but we might shee our way to advancing all you want."

Sir Richard gets up, and walks slowly two or three times up and down the room.

"I'll see about Blount," said he; "I'll talk to him. I think those things are payable in six or eight days; and that tallow-chandler won

bother me to-morrow, I dare say. I'll go to-day and talk to Blount, and suppose you come to me to-morrow evening at Mortlake. Will nine o'clock do for you? I shan't keep you half an hour,"

"A—all right, shir—nine, at Mortlake. If you want any diamondsh, I have a beoo—ootiful collar and pendantsh, in that shaafe—brilliantsh. I can give you the lot three thoushand under cosht prishe. You'll wa—ant a preshent for the young la—ady."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Sir Richard, abstractedly. "To-morrow night—to-morrow evening at nine o'clock."

He stopped at the door, looking silently down the stairs, and then without leave-taking or looking behind him, he ran down, and drove to Mr. Blount's house, close by, in Manchester Buildings.

For more than a year the young gentleman whom we are following this morning had cherished vague aspirations, of which good Lady May had been the object. There was nothing to prevent their union, for the lady was very well disposed to listen. But Richard Arden

did not like ridicule, and there was no need to hurry; and besides, within the last half-year had arisen another flame, less mercenary; also, perhaps, reciprocated.

Grace Maubray was handsome, animated; she had that combination of air, tact, cleverness, which enter into the idea of *chic*. With him it had been a financial, but notwithstanding rather agreeable, speculation. Hitherto there seemed ample time before him, and there was no need to define or decide.

Now, you will understand, the crisis had arrived, which admitted of neither hesitation nor delay. He was now at Blount's hall-door. He was certain that he could trust Blount with anything, and he meant to learn from him what *dot* his uncle David intended bestowing on the young lady.

Mr. Blount was at home. He smiled kindly, and took the young gentleman's hand, and placed a chair for him.

## CHAPTER X.

### FROM FLOWER TO FLOWER.

MR. BLOUNT was intelligent: he was an effective though not an artful diplomatist. He promptly undertook to sound Mr. Longcluse without betraying Sir Richard.

Richard Arden did not allude to his losses. He took good care to appear pretty nearly as usual. When he confessed his *tendresse* for Miss Maubray, the grave gentleman smiled brightly, and took him by the hand.

"If *you* should marry the young lady, mark you, she will have sixty thousand pounds down, and sixty thousand more after Mr. David Arden's death. That is splendid, sir, and I think it will please him *very* much."

"I have suffered a great deal, Mr. Blount, by neglecting his advice hitherto. It shall be my chief object, henceforward, to reform, and to live as he wishes. I believe people can't learn wisdom without suffering."

"Will you take a biscuit and a glass of sherry, Sir Richard?" asked Mr. Blount.

"Nothing, thanks," said Sir Richard. "You know, I'm not as rich as I might have been, and marriage is a very serious step; and you are one of the oldest and most sensible friends I have, and you'll understand that it is only right I should be very sure before taking such a step, involving not myself only, but another who ought to be dearer still, that there should be no mistake about the means on which we may reckon. Are you quite sure that my uncle's intentions are still exactly what you mentioned?"

"Perfectly; he authorized me to say so two months ago, and on the eve of his departure on Friday last he repeated his instructions."

Sir Richard, in silence, shook the old man very cordially by the hand, and was gone.

As he drove to his house in May Fair, Sir

Richard's thoughts, among other things, turned again upon the question, "Who could his mysterious benefactor be?"

Once or twice had dimly visited his mind a theory which, ever since his recent conversation with Mr. Levi, had been growing more solid and vivid. An illegitimate brother of his father's, Edwin Raikes, had gone out to Australia early in life, with a purse to which three brothers, the late Sir Reginald, Harry, and David, had contributed. He had not maintained any correspondence with English friends and kindred; but rumours from time to time reached home that he had amassed a fortune. His feelings to the family of Arden had always been kindly. He was older than Uncle David, and had well earned a retirement from the life of exertion and exile which had consumed all the vigorous years of his manhood. Was this the "old party" for whom Mr. Levi was acting?

With this thought opened a new and splendid hope upon the mind of Sir Richard. Here was a fortune, if rumour spoke truly, which, combined with David Arden's, would be amply sufficient to establish the old baronetage upon a

basis of solid magnificence such as it had never rested on before.

It would not do, however, to wait for this. The urgency of the situation demanded immediate action. Sir Richard made an elaborate toilet, after which, in a hansom, he drove to Lady May Penrose's.

If our hero had had fewer things to think about he would have gone first, I fancy, to Miss Grace Maubray. It could do no great harm, however, to feel his way a little with Lady May, he thought, as he chatted with that plump alternative of his tender dilemma. But in this wooing there was a difficulty of a whimsical kind. Poor Lady May was so easily won, and made so many openings for his advances, that he was at his wits' end to find evasions by which to postpone the happy crisis which she palpably expected. He did succeed, however; and with a promise of calling again, with the lady's permission, that evening, he took his leave.

Before making his call at his uncle's house, in the hope of seeing Grace Maubray, he had to return to Mr. Blount, in Manchester Buildings,

where he hoped to receive from that gentleman a report of his interview with Mr. Longcluse.

I shall tell you here what that report related. Mr. Longcluse was fortunately still at his house when Mr. Blount called, and immediately admitted him. Mr. Longcluse's horse and groom were at the door; he was on the point of taking his ride. His gloves and whip were beside him on the table as Mr. Blount entered.

Mr. Blount made his apologies, and was graciously received. His visit was, in truth, by no means unwelcome.

"Mr. David Arden very well, I hope?"

"Quite well, thanks. He has left town."

"Indeed! And where has he gone—the moors?"

"To Scotland, but not to shoot, I think. And he's going abroad then—going to travel."

"On the Continent? How nice that is! What part?"

"Switzerland and Italy, I think," said Mr. Blount, omitting all mention of Paris, where Mr. Arden was going first to make a visit to the Baron Vanboeren.

"He's going over ground that I know very well," said Mr. Longcluse. "Happy man! He can't quite break away from his business, though, I daresay."

"He never tells us where a letter will find him, and the consequence is his holidays are never spoiled."

"Not a bad plan, Mr. Blount. Won't he visit the Paris Exhibition?"

"I rather think not."

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Blount?"

"Well, Mr. Longcluse, I just called to ask you a question. I have been invited to take part in arranging a little matter which I take an interest in, because it affects the Arden estates."

"Is Sir Richard Arden interested in it?" inquired Mr. Longcluse, gently and coldly.

"Yes, I rather fancy he would be benefited."

"I have had a good deal of unpleasantness, and, I might add, a great deal of ingratitude from that quarter, and I have made up my mind never again to have anything to do with him or his affairs. I have no unpleasant *feeling*, you understand; no resentment; there is nothing, of

course, he could say or do that could in the least affect me. It is simply that, having coolly reviewed his conduct, I have quite made up my mind to aid in nothing in which he has act, part, on interest."

"It was not *directly*, but simply as a surety—"

"All the same, so far as I'm concerned," said Mr. Longcluse sharply.

"And only, I fancied, it might be, as Mr. David Arden is absent, and you should be protected by satisfactory joint security——"

"I won't do it," said Mr. Longcluse, a little brusquely; and he took out his watch and glanced at it impatiently.

"Sir Richard, I think, will be in funds immediately," said Mr. Blount.

"How so?" asked Mr. Longcluse. "You'll excuse me, as you press the subject, for saying *that* will be something new."

"Well," said Mr. Blount, who saw that his last words had made an impression, "Sir Richard is likely to be married, very advantageously, immediately.

"Are settlements agreed on?" inquired Mr. Longcluse, with real interest.

"No, not yet; but I know all about them."

"He is accepted, then?"

"He has not proposed yet; but there can be, I fancy, no doubt that the lady likes him, and all will go right."

"Oh! and who is the lady?"

"I'm not at liberty to tell."

"Quite right; I ought not to have asked," says Mr. Longcluse, and looks down, slapping at intervals the side of his trousers lightly with his whip. He raises his eyes to Mr. Blount's face, and looks on the point of asking another question, but he does not.

"It is my opinion," said Mr. Blount, "the kindness would involve absolutely no risk whatever."

There was a little pause. Mr. Longcluse looks rather dark and anxious; perhaps his mind has wandered quite from the business before them. But it returns, and he says—

"Risk or no risk, Mr. Blount, I don't mean to do him that kindness; and for how long will Mr. David Arden be absent?"

"Unless he should take a sudden thought to return, he'll be away at least two months."

"Where is he?—in Scotland?"

"I *really* don't know."

"Couldn't one see him for a few minutes before he starts? Where does he take the steamer?"

"Southampton."

"And on what day?"

"You really want a word with him?" asked Blount, whose hopes revived.

"I may."

"Well, the only person who will know that is Mr. Humphries, of Pendle Castle, near that town; for he has to transact some trust-business with that gentleman as he passes through."

"Humphries, of Pendle Castle. Very good; thanks."

Mr. Longcluse looks again at his watch.

"And perhaps you will reconsider the matter I spoke of?"

"No use, Mr. Blount—not the least. I have quite made up my mind. Anything more? I am afraid I must be off."

"Nothing, thanks," said Mr. Blount.

And so the interview ended.

When he was gone, Mr. Longcluse thought darkly for a minute.

"That's a straightforward fellow, they say. I suppose the facts are so. It can't be, though, that Miss Maubray, that handsome creature with so much money, is thinking of marrying that insolent coxcomb. It may be Lady May, but the other is more likely. We must not allow *that*, Sir Richard. That would never do."

There was a fixed frown on his face, and he was smiling in his dream. Out he went. His pale face looked as if he meditated a wicked joke, and, frowning still in utter abstraction, he took the bridle from his groom, mounted, looked about him as if just wakened, and set off at a canter, followed by his servant, for David Arden's house.

Smiling, gay, as if no care had ever crossed him, Longclose enters the drawing-room, where he finds the handsome young lady writing a note at that moment.

"Mr. Longcluse, I'm so glad you've come!" she says with a brilliant smile. "I was writing to poor Lady Ethel, who is mourning, you know, in the country. The death of her father

in the house was so awfully sudden, and I'm telling her all the news I can think of to amuse her. And is it really true that old Sir Thomas Giggles has grown so cross with his pretty young wife, and objects to her allowing Lord Knocknea to make love to her?"

"Quite true. It is a very bad quarrel, and I'm afraid it can't be made up," said Mr. Longcluse.

"It must be very bad, indeed, if Sir Thomas can't make it up; for he allowed his first wife, I am told, to do anything she pleased. Is it to be a separation?"

"At *least*. And you heard, I suppose, of poor old Lady Glare?"

"No!"

"She has been rolling ever so long, you know, in a sea of troubles, and now, at last, she has fairly foundered."

"How do you mean?"

"They have sold her diamonds," said Mr. Longcluse. "Didn't you hear?"

"No! Really? Sold her diamonds? Good Heaven! Then there's nothing left of her but her teeth. I hope they won't sell them."

"It is an awful misfortune," said Mr. Longcluse.

"Misfortune! She's utterly ruined. It was her diamonds that people asked. I am really sorry. She was such fun; she was so fat, and such a fool, and said such delicious things, and dressed herself so like a macaw. Alas! I shall never see her more; and people thought her only use on earth was to carry about her diamonds. No one seemed to perceive what a delightful creature she was. What about Lady May Penrose? I have not seen her since I came back from Cowes, the day before yesterday, and we leave London together on Tuesday."

"Lady May! Oh! she is to receive a very interesting communication, I believe. She is one name on a pretty long and very distinguished list, which Sir Richard Arden, I am told, has made out, and carries about with him in his pocket-book."

"You're talking riddles; pray speak plainly."

"Well, Lady May is one of several ladies who are to be honoured with a proposal."

"And would you have me believe that Sir

Richard Arden has really made such a fool of himself as to make out a list of eligible ladies whom he is about to ask to marry him, and that he has had the excellent good sense and taste to read this list to his acquaintance?"

"I mean to say this—I'll tell the whole story—Sir Richard has ruined himself at play; take that as a fact to start with. He is literally ruined. His uncle is away; but I don't think any man in his senses would think of paying his losses for him. He turns, therefore, naturally to the more amiable and less arithmetical sex, and means to invite, in turn, a series of fair and affluent admirers to undertake, by means of suitable settlements, that interesting office for him."

"I don't think you like him, Mr. Longcluse; is not that a story a little too like 'The Merry Wives of Windsor?'"

"It is quite certain I don't like him, and it is quite certain," added Mr. Longcluse, with one of his cold little laughs, "that if I did like him I should not tell the story; but it is also certain that the story is, in all its parts, strictly fact. If you permit me the pleasure of a call in two

or three days, you will tell me you no longer doubt it."

Mr. Longcluse was looking down as he said that with a gentle and smiling significance. The young lady blushed a little, and then more intensely, as he spoke, and looking through the window, asked with a laugh—

"But how shall we know whether he really speaks to Lady May?"

"Possibly by his marrying her," laughed Mr. Longcluse. "He certainly will if he can, unless he is caught and married on the way to her house."

"He was a little unfortunate in showing you his list, wasn't he?" said Grace Maubray.

"I did not say that. If there had been any, the least, confidence, nothing on earth could have induced me to divulge it. We are not even, at present, on speaking terms. He had the coolness to send a Mr. Blount, who transacts all Mr. David Arden's affairs, to ask me to become his security, Mr. Arden being away; and by way of inducing me to do so, he disclosed, with the coarseness which is the essence of business, the matrimonial schemes which are

to recoup within a few days the losses of the roulette, the whist-table, or the dice-box."

"Oh! Mr. Blount, I'm told, is a very honest man."

"Quite so; particularly accurate, and I don't think anything on earth would induce him to tell an untruth," testifies Mr. Longcluse.

After a little pause, Miss Maubray laughs.

"One certainly does learn," she said, "something new every day. Could any one have fancied a *gentleman* descending to so gross a meanness?"

"Everybody is a gentleman now-a-days," remarked Mr. Longcluse with a smile; "but every one is not a hero—they give way more or less under temptation. Those who stand the test of the crucible and the furnace are seldom met with."

At this moment the door opened, and Lord Wynderbroke was announced. A little start, a lighting of the eyes, as Grace rose, and a fluttered advance, with a very pretty little hand extended, to meet him, testified, perhaps, rather more surprise than one would have quite expected. For Mr. Longcluse, who did not know

him so well as Miss Maubray, recognized his voice, which was peculiar and resembling the caw of a jay, as he put a question to the servant on his way up.

Mr. Longcluse took his leave. He was not sorry that Lord Wynderbroke had called. He wished no success to Sir Richard's wooing. He thought he had pretty well settled the question in Miss Maubray's mind, and smiling, he rode at a pleasant canter to Lady May's. It was as well, perhaps, that she should hear the same story. Lady May, however, unfortunately had just gone out for a drive.

## CHAPTER XI.

### BEHIND THE ARRAS.

IT was quite true that Lady May was not at home. She was actually, with a charming little palpitation, driving to pay a very interesting visit to Grace Maubray. In affairs of the kind that now occupied her mind, she had no confidants but very young people.

Miss Maubray was at home—and instantly Lady May's plump instep was seen on the carriage step. She disdained assistance, and descended with a heavy skip upon the flags, where she executed an involuntary frisk that carried her a little out of the line of advance.

As she ascended the stairs she met her friend Lord Wynderbroke coming down. They stopped for a moment on the landing, under a picture of Cupid and Venus; and Lady May, smiling, re-

marked, a little out of breath, what a charming day it was, and expressed her amazement at seeing him in town—a surprise which he agreeably reciprocated. He had been at Glenkiltie in the Highlands, where he had accidentally met Mr. David Arden. "Miss Maubray is in the drawing-room," he said, observing that the eyes of the good lady glanced unconsciously upward at the door of that room. And then they parted affectionately, and turned their backs on each other with a sense of relief.

"Well, my dear," she said to Grace Maubray as soon as they had kissed, "longing to have a few minutes with you, with ever so much to say. You have no idea what it is to be stopped on the stairs by that tiresome man—I'll never quarrel with you again for calling him a bore. No matter, here I am; and really, my dear, it *is* such an odd affair—not quite that: such an odd scene, I don't know where or how to begin."

"I wish I could help you," said Miss Maubray laughing.

"Oh, my dear, you'd never guess in a hundred years."

"How do you know? Hasn't a certain baronet something to do with it?"

"Well, well—dear me! That is *very* extraordinary. Did he tell you he was going to—to —Good gracious! My dear, it *is* the most extraordinary thing. I believe you hear everything; but—a—but *listen.* Not an hour ago he came—Richard Arden, of course, we mean—and, my dear Grace, he spoke so very nicely of his troubles, poor fellow, you know—debts I mean, of course—not the least his fault, and all that kind of thing, and—he went on—I really don't know how to tell you. But he said—he said—he said he liked me, and no one else on earth; and he was on the very point of saying *everything*, when, just at that moment, who should come in but that gossiping old woman, Lady Botherton—and he whispered, as he was going, that he would return, after I had had my drive. The carriage was at the door, so, when I got rid of the old woman, I got into it, and came straight here to have a talk with you; and what do you think I ought to say? Do tell me, like a darling, do!"

"I wish you would tell *me* what one ought to

say to that question," said Grace Maubray with a slight disdain (that young lady was in the most unreasonable way piqued), "for I'm told he's going to ask me precisely the same question."

"*You*, my dear?" said Lady May after a pause, during which she was staring at the smiling face of the young lady; "you can't be serious!"

"*He* can't be serious, you mean," answered the young lady, "and—who's this?" she broke off, as she saw a cab drive up to the hall-door. "Dear me! is it? No. Yes, indeed, it is Sir Richard Arden. We must not be seen together. He'll know you have been talking to me. Just go in here."

She opened the door of the boudoir adjoining the room.

"I'll send him away in a moment. You may hear every word I have to say. I should like it. I shall give him a lecture."

As she thus spoke she heard his step on the stair, and motioned Lady May into the inner room, into which she hurried and closed the door, leaving it only a little way open.

These arrangements are hardly completed when Sir Richard is announced. Grace is positively angry. But never had she looked so beautiful; her eyes so tenderly lustrous under their long lashes; her colour so brilliant—an expression so maidenly and sad. If it was acting, it was very well done. You would have sworn that the melancholy and agitation of her looks, and the slightly quickened movement of her breathing, were those of a person who felt that the hour of her fate had come.

With what elation Richard Arden saw these beautiful signs!

## CHAPTER XII.

### A BUBBLE BROKEN.

AFTER a few words had been exchanged, Grace said, in reply to a question of Sir Richard's—

"Lady May and I are going together, you know: in a day or two we shall be at Brighton. I mean to bid Alice good-bye to-day. There—I mean at Brighton—we are to meet Vivian Darnley, and possibly another friend; and we go to meet your uncle at that pretty little town in Switzerland, where Lady May——I wonder, by-the-by, you did not arrange to come with us; Lady May travels with us the entire time. She says there are some very interesting ruins there."

"Why, dear old soul!" said Sir Richard, who

felt called upon to say something to set himself right with respect to Lady May, "she's thinking of quite another place. She will be herself the only interesting ruin there."

"I think you wish to vex me," said pretty Grace, turning away with a smile, which showed, nevertheless, that this kind of joke was not an unmixed vexation to her. "I don't care for ruins myself."

"Nor do I," he said, archly.

"But you don't think so of Lady May. I know you don't. You are franker with her than with me, and you tell her a very different tale."

"I must be very frank, then, if I tell her more than I know myself. I never said a civil thing of Lady May, except once or twice, to the poor old thing herself, when I wanted her to do one or two little things, to please *you*."

"Oh! come, you can't deceive me; I've seen you place your hand to your heart, like a theatrical hero, when you little fancied any one but she saw it."

"Now, really, that is too bad. I may have put my hand to my side when it ached from laughing."

"How can you talk so? You know very well I have heard you tell her how you admire her music and her landscapes."

"No, no—not landscapes—she paints faces. But her colouring is, as artists say, too chalky —and nothing but red and white, like—what is it like?—like a clown. Why did not she get the late Mr. Etty—she's always talking of him —to teach her something of his tints?"

"You are not to speak so of Lady May. You forget she is my particular friend," says the young lady; but her pretty face does not express so much severity as her words. "I do think you like her. You merely talk so to throw dust in people's eyes. Why should not you be frank with me?"

"I wish I dare be frank with you," said Sir Richard.

"And why not?"

"How can I tell how my disclosures might be punished? My frankness might extinguish the best hope I live for; a few rash words might make me a very unhappy man for life."

"Really? Then I can quite understand that reflection alarming you in the midst of a tête-à-

tête with Lady May; and even interrupting an interesting conversation."

Sir Richard looked at her quickly, but her looks were perfectly artless.

"I really do wish you would spare me all further allusion to that good woman. I can bear that kind of fun from any one but you. Why will you? she is old enough to be my mother. She is fat, and painted, and ridiculous. You think me totally without romance? I wish to heaven I were. There is a reason that makes your saying all that particularly cruel. I am not the sordid creature you take me for. I'm not insensible. I'm not a mere stock of stone. Never was human being more capable of the wildest passion. Oh, if I dare tell you all!"

Was all this acting? Certainly not. Never was shallow man, for the moment, more in earnest. Cool enough he was, although he had always admired this young lady, when he entered the room. He had made that entrance, nevertheless, in a spirit quite dramatic. But Miss Maubray never looked so brilliant, never half so tender. He took fire—the situation aiding quite unexpectedly—and the flame was real.

It might have been over as quickly as a balloon on fire; but for the moment the conflagration was intense.

How was Miss Maubray affected? An immensely abler performer than the young gentleman who had entered the room with his part at his fingers' ends, and all his looks and emphasis arranged—only to break through all this, and began extemporising wildly—she, on the contrary, maintained her *rôle* with admirable coolness. It was not, perhaps, so easy; for notwithstanding appearances, her histrionic powers were severely tasked; for never was she more angry. Her self-esteem was wounded; the fancy (it was no more) she had cherished for him was gone, and a great disgust was there instead.

"You shall ask me no questions till I have done asking mine," said the young lady with decision; "and I will speak as much as I please of Lady May!"

This jealousy flattered Sir Richard.

"And I will say this," continued Grace Maubray, "you never address her except as a lover,

in what you romantic people would call the language of love."

"Now, now, now! How can you say that? Is that fair?"

"You do."

"No, really, I swear—that's *too* bad!"

"Yes, the other day, when you spoke to her at the carriage window—you did not think I heard—you accused her so tenderly of having failed to go to Lady Harbroke's garden-party, and you couldn't say what you meant in plain terms, but you said, 'Why were you false?'"

"I didn't, I swear."

"Oh! you did; I heard every syllable; 'false' was the word."

"Well, if I said 'false,' I must have been thinking of her hair; for she is really a very honest old woman."

At this moment a female voice in distress is heard, and poor Lady May comes pushing out of the pretty little room, in which Grace Maubray had placed her, sobbing and shedding floods of tears.

"I can't stay there any longer, for I hear everything; I can't help hearing every word—

honest old woman, and all—opprobrious. Oh! how *can* people be so? how *can* they? Oh! I'm very angry—I'm very angry—I'm very angry!"

If Miss Maubray were easily moved to pity she might have been at sight of the big innocent eyes turned up at her, from which rolled great tears, making visible channels through the paint down her cheeks. She sobbed and wept like a fat, good-natured child, and pitifully she continued sobbing, "Oh, I'm a-a-ho—very angry; wha-at shall I do-o-o, my dear? I-I'm very angry—oh, oh—I'm very a-a-angry!"

"So am I," said Grace Maubray, with a fiery glance at the young Baronet, who stood fixed where he was, like an image of death; "and I had intended, dear Lady May, telling you a thing, which Sir Richard Arden may as well hear, as I mean to write to tell Alice to-day; it is that I am to be married—I have accepted Lord Wynderbroke—and—and that's all."

Sir Richard, I believe, said "Good-bye." Nobody heard him. I don't think he remembers how he got on his horse. I don't think the ladies saw him leave the room—only, he was gone.

Poor Lady May takes her incoherent leave. She has got her veil over her face, to baffle curiosity. Miss Maubray stands at the window, the tip of her finger to her brilliant lip, contemplating Lady May as she gets in with a great jerk and swing of the carriage, and she hears the footman say "Home," and sees a fat hand, in a lilac glove, pull up the window hurriedly. Then she sits down on a sofa, and laughs till she quivers again, and tears overflow her eyes; and she says in the intervals, almost breathless—

"Oh, poor old thing! I really am sorry. Who could have thought she cared so much? Poor old soul! what a ridiculous old thing!"

Such broken sentences of a rather contemptuous pity rolled and floated along the even current of her laughter.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BOND AND DEED.

THE summer span of days was gone; it was quite dark, and long troops of withered leaves drifted in rustling trains over the avenue, as Mr. Levi, observant of his appointment, drove up to the grand old front of Mortlake, which in the dark spread before him like a house of white mist.

"I shay," exclaimed Mr. Levi, softly, arresting the progress of the cabman, who was about running up the steps, "I'll knock myshelf—wait you there."

Mr. Levi was smoking. Standing at the base of the steps, he looked up, and right and left, with some curiosity. It was too dark; he could

hardly see the cold glimmer of the windows that reflected the gray horizon. Vaguely, however, he could see that it was a grander place than he had supposed. He looked down the avenue, and between the great trees over the gate he saw the distant lights, and heard through the dim air the chimes, far off, from London steeples, succeeding one another, or mingling faintly, and telling all whom it might concern the solemn lesson of the flight of time.

Mr. Levi thought it might be worth while coming down in the daytime, and looking over the house and place to see what could be made of them; the thing was sure to go a dead bargain. At present he could see nothing but the wide, vague, grey front, and the faint glow through the hall windows, which showed their black outlines sharply enough.

"Well, *he*'sh come a mucker, anyhow," murmured Mr. Levi, with one of his smiles that showed so wide his white sharp teeth.

He knocked at the door and rang the bell. It was not a footman, but Crozier who opened it. The old servant of the family did not like the greasy black curls, the fierce jet eyes, the

sallow face, and the large, moist, sullen mouth, that presented themselves under the brim of Mr. Levi's hat, nor the tawdry glimmer of chains on his waistcoat, nor the cigar still burning in his fingers. Sir Richard had told Crozier, however, that a Mr. Levi, whom he described, was to call at a certain hour, on very particular business, and was to be instantly admitted.

Mr. Levi looks round him, and extinguishes his cigar before following Crozier, whose countenance betrays no small contempt and dislike, as he eyes the little man askance, as if he would like well to be uncivil to him.

Crozier leads him to the right, through a small apartment, to a vast square room, long disused, still called the library, though but few books remain on the shelves, and those in disorder. It is a chilly night, and a little fire burns in the grate, over which Sir Richard is cowering. Very haggard, the Baronet starts up as the name of his visitor is announced.

"Come in," cries Sir Richard, walking to meet him. "Here—here I am, Levi, utterly ruined. There isn't a soul I dare tell how I am beset, or anything to, but you. Do, for God's sake, take

pity on me, and think of something! my brain's quite gone—you're such a clever fellow" (he is dragging Levi by the arm all this time towards the candles): "do now, you're sure to see some way out. It is a matter of *honour;* I only want time. If I could only find my Uncle David: think of his selfishness—good heaven! was there ever man so treated? and there's the bank letter —*there*—on the table; you see it—dunning me, the ungrateful harpies, for the trifle—what is it? —three hundred and something, I overdrew; and that blackguard tallow-chandler has been three times to my house in town, for payment to-day, and it's more than I thought—near four thousand, he says—the scoundrel! It's just the same to him two months hence; he's full of money, the beast—a fellow like that—it's de-i ght to him to get hold of a gentleman, and he won't take a bill—the lying rascal! He is pressed for cash just now—a pug-faced villain with three hundred thousand pounds! Those scoundrels! I mean the people, whatever they are, that lent me the money; it turns out it was all but at sight, and they were with my attorney to-day, and they won't wait. I wish I was

shot; I envy the dead dogs rolling in the Thames! By heaven! Levi, I'll say you're the best friend man ever had on earth, I will, if you manage something! I'll never forget it to you; I'll have it in my power, yet! no one ever said I was ungrateful; I swear I'll be the making of you! *Do*, Levi, think; you're accustomed to—to emergency, and unless you will, I'm utterly ruined—ruined, by heaven, before I have time to think!"

The Jew listened to all this with his hands in his pockets, leaning back in his chair, with his big eyes staring on the wild face of the Baronet, and his heavy mouth hanging. He was trying to reduce his countenance to vacancy.

"What about them shettlements, Sir Richard—a nishe young lady with a ha-a-tful o' money?" insinuated Levi.

"I've been thinking over that, but it wouldn't do, with my affairs in this state, it would not be honourable or straight. Put that quite aside."

Mr. Levi gaped at him for a moment solemnly, and turned suddenly, and, brute as he was, spit on the Turkey carpet. He was not, as you per-

ceive, ceremonious; but he could not allow the Baronet to see the laughter that without notice caught him for a moment, and could think of no better way to account for his turning away his head.

"That'sh wery honourable indeed," said the Jew, more solemn than ever; "and if you can't play in that direction, I'm afraid you're in queer shtreet."

The Baronet was standing close before Levi, and at these words from that dirty little oracle, a terrible chill stole up from his feet to the crown of his head. Like a frozen man he stood there, and the Jew saw that his very lips were white. Sir Richard feels, for the first time, actually, that he is ruined.

The young man tries to speak, twice. The big eyes of the Jew are staring up at the contortion. Sir Richard can see nothing but those two big fiery eyes; he turns quickly away and walks to the end of the room.

"There's just one fiddle-string left to play on," muses the Jew.

"For God's sake!" exclaims Sir Richard, turning about, in a voice you would not have known,

and for fully a minute the room was so silent you could scarcely have believed that two men were breathing in it.

"Shir Richard, will you be so good as to come nearer a bit? There, that'sh the cheeshe. I brought thish 'ere thing."

It is a square parchment with a good deal of printed matter, and blanks written in, and a law stamp fixed with an awful regularity, at the corner.

"Casht your eye over it," says Levi, coaxingly, as he pushes it over the table to the young gentleman, who is sitting now at the other side.

The young man looks at it, reads it, but just then, if it had been a page of "Robinson Crusoe," he could not have understood it.

"I'm not quite myself, I can't follow it; too much to think of. What is it?"

"A bond and warrant to confess judgment."

"What is it for?"

"Ten thoushand poundsh."

"Sign it, shall I? Can you do anything with it?"

"Don't raishe your voishe, but lishten. Your

friend"—and at the phrase Mr. Levi winked mysteriously—"has enough to do it twishe over; and upon my shoul, I'll shwear on the book, azh I hope to be shaved, it will never shee the light; he'll never raishe a pig on it, sho' 'elp me, nor let it out of hish 'ands, till he givesh it back to you. He can't ma-ake no ushe of it; I knowshe him well, and he'll pay you the ten thoushand to-morrow morning, and he wantsh to shake handsh with you, and make himself known to you, and talk a bit."

"But—but my signature wouldn't satisfy him," began Sir Richard, bewildered.

"Oh! *no*—no, no!" murmured Mr. Levi, fiddling with the corner of the bank's reminder which lay on the table.

"Mr. Longcluse won't sign it," said Sir Richard.

Mr. Levi threw himself back in his chair, and looked with a roguish expression still upon the table, and gave the corner of the note a little fillip.

"Well," said Levi, after both had been some time silent, "it ain't much, only to write his name on the penshil line, *there*, you see, and

*there*—he shouldn't make no bonesh about it. Why, it's done every day. Do you think I'd help in a thing of the short if there was any danger? The Sheneral's come to town, is he? What are you afraid of? Don't you be a shild —ba-ah!"

All this Mr. Levi said so low that it was as ir he were whispering to the table, and he kept looking down as he put the parchment over to Sir Richard, who took it in his hand, and the bond trembled so much that he set it down again.

"Leave it with me," he said faintly.

Levi got up with an unusual hectic in each cheek, and his eyes very brilliant.

"I'll meet you what time you shay to-night; you had besht take a little time. It'sh ten now. Three hoursh will do it. I'll go on to my offish by one o'clock, and you come any time from one to two."

Sir Richard was trembling.

"Between one and two, mind. Hang it! Shir Richard, don't you be a fool about nothing," whispers the Jew, as black as thunder.

He is fumbling in his breast-pocket, and pul-

ling out a sheaf of letters; he selects one, which he throws upon the parchment that lies open on the table.

"That'sh the note you forgot in my offish yeshterday, with hish name shined to it. There, now you have everything."

Without any form of valediction, the Jew had left the room. Sir Richard sits with his teeth set, and a strange frown upon his face, scarcely breathing. He hears the cab drive away. Before him on the table lie the papers.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### SIR RICHARD'S RESOLUTION.

TWO hours had passed, and more, of solitude. With a candle in his hand, and his hat and great-coat on, Sir Richard Arden came out into the hall. His trap awaited him at the door.

In the interval of his solitude, something incredible has happened to him. It is over. A spectral secret accompanies him henceforward. A devil sits in his pocket, in that parchment. He dares not think of himself. Something sufficient to shake the world of London, and set all English Christian tongues throughout the earth wagging on one theme, has happened.

Does he repent? One thing is certain—he dares not falter. Something within him once

or twice commanded him to throw his crime into the fire, while yet it is obliterable. But what then? what of to-morrow? Into that sheer black sea of ruin, that reels and yawns as deep as eye can fathom beneath him, he must dive and see the light no more. Better his chance.

He won't think of what he has done, of what he is going to do. He suspects his courage: he dares not tempt his cowardice. Braver, perhaps, it would have been to meet the worst at once. But surely, according to the theory of chances, we have played the true game. Is not a little time gained, everything? Are we not in friendly hands? Has not that little scoundrel committed himself, by an all but actual participation in the affair? It can never come to *that*. "I have only to confess, and throw myself at Uncle David's feet, and the one dangerous debt would instantly be brought up, and cancelled."

These thoughts came vaguely, and on his heart lay an all but insupportable load. The sight of the staircase reminded him that Alice must long since have gone to her room. He

yearned to see her and say good-night. It was the last farewell that the brother she had known from her childhood till now should ever speak or look. That brother was to die to-night, and a spirit of guilt to come in his stead.

He taps lightly at her door. She is asleep. He opens it, and dimly sees her innocent head upon the pillow. If his shadow were cast upon her dream, what an image would she have seen looking in at the door! A sudden horror seizes him—he draws back and closes the door; on the lobby he pauses. It was a last moment of grace. He stole down the stairs, mounted his tax-cart, took the reins from his servant in silence, and drove swiftly into town. In Parliament Street, near the corner of the street leading to Levi's office, they passed a policeman, lounging on the flagway. Richard Arden is in a strangely nervous state; he fancies he will stop and question him, and he touches the horse with the whip to get quickly by.

In his breast-pocket he carried his ghastly secret. A pretty business if he happened to be thrown out, and a policeman should make an inventory of his papers, as he lay insensible in

an hospital—a pleasant thing if he were robbed in these villanous streets, and the bond advertised, for a reward, by a pretended finder. A nice thing, good heaven! if it should wriggle and slip its way out of his pocket, in the jolting and tremble of the drive, and fall into London hands, either rascally or severe. He pulled up, and gave the reins to the servant, and felt, however gratefully, with his fingers, the crisp crumple of the parchment under the cloth! Did his servant look at him oddly as he gave him the reins? Not he; but Sir Richard began to suspect him and everything. He made him stop near the angle of the street, and there he got down, telling him rather savagely—for his fancied look was still in the Baronet's brain—not to move an inch from that spot.

It was half-past one as his steps echoed down the street in which Mr. Levi had his office. There was a figure leaning with its back in the recess of Levi's door, smoking. Sir Richard's temper was growing exasperated.

It was Levi himself. Upstairs they stumble in the dark. Mr. Levi has not said a word. He is not treating his visitor with much cere-

mony. He lets himself into his office, secured with a heavy iron bar, and a lock that makes a great clang, and proceeds to light a candle. The flame expands and the light shows well-barred shutters, and the familiar objects.

When Mr. Levi had lighted a second candle, he fixed his great black eyes on the young Baronet, who glances over his shoulder at the door, but the Jew has secured it. Their eyes meet for a moment, and Sir Richard places his hand nervously in his breast-pocket and takes out the parchment. Levi nods and extends his hand. Each now holds it by a corner, and as Sir Richard lets it go hesitatingly, he says faintly—

"Levi, you wouldn't—you could not run any risk with that?"

Levi stands by his great iron safe, with the big key in his hand. He nods in reply, and locking up the document, he knocks his knuckles on the iron door, with a long and solemn wink.

"*Sha-afe!*—that'sh the word," says he, and then he drops the keys into his pocket again.

There was a silence of a minute or more. A spell was stealing over them; an influence was

in the room. Each eyed the other shrinkingly, as a man might eye an assassin. The Jew knew that there was danger in that silence; and yet he could not break it. He could not disturb the influence acting on Richard Arden's mind. It was his good angel's last pleading, before the long farewell.

In a dreadful whisper Richard Arden speaks:

"Give me that parchment back," says he.

Satan finds his tongue again.

"Give it back?" repeats Levi, and a pause ensues. "Of course I'll give it back; and I wash my hands of it and you, and you're throwing away ten thoushand poundsh for *nothing*."

Levi was taking out his keys as he spoke, and as he fumbled them over one by one, he said—

"You'll want a lawyer in the Insholwent Court, and you'd find Mishter Sholomonsh azh shatisfactory a shengleman azh any in London. He'sh an auctioneer, too; and there'sh no good in your meetin' that friendly cove here to-morrow, for he'sh one o' them honourable chaps, and he'll never look at you after your schedule's

lodged, and the shooner that'sh done the better; and them women we was courting, won't they laugh!"

Hereupon, with great alacrity, Mr. Levi began to apply the key to the lock.

"Don't mind. Keep it; and mind, you d——d little swindler, so sure as you stand there, if you play me a trick, I'll blow your brains out, if it were in the police-office!"

Mr. Levi looked hard at him, and nodded. He was accustomed to excited language in certain situations.

"Well," said he coolly, a second time returning the keys to his pocket, "your friend will be here at twelve to-morrow, and if you please him as well as he expects, who knows wha-at may be? If he leavesh you half hish money, you'll not 'ave many bill transhactionsh on your handsh."

"May God Almighty have mercy on me!" groans Sir Richard, hardly above his breath.

"You shall have the cheques then. He'll be here all right."

"I—I forget; did you say an hour?"

Levi repeats the hour. Sir Richard walks slowly to the stairs, down which Levi lights him. Neither speaks.

In a few minutes more the young gentleman is driving rapidly to his town house, where he means to end that long-remembered night.

When he had got to his room, and dismissed his valet, he sat down. He looked round, and wondered how collected he now was. The situation seemed like a dream, or his sense of danger had grown torpid. He could not account for the strange indifference that had come over him. He got quickly into bed. It was late, and he exhausted, and aided, I know not by what narcotic, he slept a constrained, odd sleep—black as Erebus—the thread of which snaps suddenly, and he is awake with a heart beating fast, as if from a sudden start. A hard bitter voice has said close by the pillow, "You are the first Arden that ever did that!" and with these words grating in his ears, he awoke, and had a confused remembrance of having been dreaming of his father.

Another dream, later on, startled him still

more. He was in Levi's office, and while they were talking over the horrid document, in a moment it blew out of the window; and a lean, ill-looking man, in a black coat, like the famous person who, in old woodcuts, picked up the shadow of Peter Schlemel, caught the parchment from the pavement, and with his eyes fixed cornerwise upon him, and a dreadful smile, tapped his long finger on the bond, and with wide paces stepped swiftly away with it in his hand.

Richard Arden started up in his bed; the cold moisture of terror was upon his forehead, and for a moment he did not know where he was, or how much of his vision was real. The grey twilight of early morning was over the town. He welcomed the light; he opened the window-shutters wide. He looked from the window down upon the street. A lean man in tattered black, with a hammer in his hand, just as the man in his dream had held the roll of parchment, was slowly stepping with long strides away from his house, along the street.

As his thoughts cleared, his panic increased. Nothing had happened between the time of his

lying down and his up-rising to alter his situation, and the same room sees him now half mad.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE MEETING.

NEAR the appointed hour, he walked across the park, and through the Horse Guards, and in a few minutes more was between the tall old-fashioned houses of the street in which Mr. Levi's office is to be found. He passes by a dingy hired coach, with a tarnished crest on the door, and sees two Jewish-looking men inside, both smiling over some sly joke. Whose door are they waiting at? He supposes another Jewish office seeks the shade of that pensive street.

Mr. Levi opened his office door for his handsome client. They were quite to themselves. Mr. Levi did not look well. He received him

with a nod. He shut the door when Sir Richard was in the room.

"He'sh not come yet. We'll talk to him inshide." He indicates the door of the inner room, with a little side jerk of his head. "That'sh private. He hazh that—*thing* all right."

Sir Richard says nothing. He follows Levi into a small inner room, which had, perhaps, originally been a lady's boudoir, and had afterwards, one might have conjectured, served as the treasury of the cash and jewels of a pawn-office; for its door was secured with iron bars, and two great locks, and the windows were well barred with iron. There were two huge iron safes in the room, built into the wall.

"I'll show you a beauty of a dresshing-ca-ashe," said Levi, rousing himself; "I'll shell it a dead bargain, and give time for half, if you knowsh any young shwell as wantsh such a harticle. Look here; it was made for the Duchess of Horleans—all in gold, hemerald, and brilliantsh."

And thus haranguing, he displayed its con-

tents, and turned them over, staring on them with a livid admiration. Sir Richard is not thinking of the Duchess's dressing-case, nor is he much more interested when Mr. Levi goes on to tell him, "There'sh three executions against peersh out thish week—two gone down to the country. Sholomonsh nobbled Lord Bylkington's carriage outshide Shyner's at two o'clock in the morning, and his lordship had to walk home in the rain;" and Levi laughs and wriggles pleasantly over the picture. "I think he'sh coming," says Levi suddenly, inclining his ear toward the door. He looked back over his shoulder with an odd look, a little stern, at the young gentleman.

"Who?" asked the young man, a little uncertain, in consequence of the character of that look.

"Your—that—your friend, of course," said Levi, with his eyes again averted, and his ear near the door.

It was a moment of trepidation and of hope to Richard Arden. He hears the steps of several persons in the next room. Levi opens a little bit of the door, and peeps through, and

with a quick glance towards the Baronet, he whispers, "Ay, it's him."

Oh, blessed hope! here comes, at last, a powerful friend to take him by the hand, and draw him, in his last struggle, from the whirlpool.

Sir Richard glances towards the door through which the Jew is still looking, and signing with his hand as, little by little, he opens it wider and wider; and a voice in the next room, at sound of which Sir Richard starts to his feet, says sharply, "Is all right?"

"All *right*," replies Levi, getting aside; and Mr. Longcluse entered the room and shut the door.

His pale face looked paler than usual, his thin cruel lips were closed, his nostrils dilated with a terrible triumph, and his eyes were fixed upon Arden, as he held the fatal parchment in his hand.

Levi saw a scowl so dreadful contract Sir Richard Arden's face—was it pain, or was it fury?—that, drawing back as far as the wall would let him, he almost screamed, "It ain't me!—it ain't my fault!—I can't help it!—I

couldn't!—I can't!" His right hand was in his pocket, and his left, trembling violently, extended toward him, as if to catch his arm.

But Richard Arden was not thinking of him —did not hear him. He was overpowered. He sat down in his chair. He leaned back with a gasp and a faint laugh, like a man just overtaken by a wave and lifted half-drowned from the sea. Then, with a sudden cry, he threw his hands and head on the table.

There was no token of relenting in Longcluse's cruel face. There was a contemptuous pleasure in it. He did not remove his eyes from that spectacle of abasement as he replaced the parchment in his pocket. There is a silence of about a minute, and Sir Richard sits up and says vaguely—

"Thank God, it's over! Take me away; I'm ready to go."

"You shall go, time enough; I have a word to say first," said Longcluse, and he signs to the Jew to leave them.

On being left to themselves, the first idea that struck Sir Richard was the wild one of escape. He glanced quickly at the window.

It was barred with iron. There were men in the next room—he could not tell how many—and he was without arms. The hope lighted up, and almost at the same moment expired.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### MR. LONGCLUSE PROPOSES.

"CLEAR your head," says Mr. Longcluse, sternly, seating himself before Sir Richard, with the table between; "you must conceive a distinct idea of your situation, sir, and I shall then tell you something that remains. You have committed a forgery under aggravated circumstances, for which I shall have you convicted and sentenced to penal servitude at the next sessions. I have been a good friend to you on many occasions; you have been a false one to me—who baser?—and while I was anonymously helping you with large sums of money, you forged my name to a legal instrument for ten thousand pounds, to swindle

your unknown benefactor, little suspecting who he was."

Longcluse smiled.

"I have heard how you spoke of me. I'm an adventurer, a leg, an assassin, a person whom you were compelled to drop; rather a low person, I fear, if a felon can't afford to sit beside me! You were always too fine a man for me. Your get up was always peculiar; you were famous for that. It will soon be more singular still, when your hair and your clothes are cut after the fashion of the great world you are about to enter. How your friends will laugh!"

Sir Richard heard all this with a helpless stare.

"I have only to stamp on the ground, to call up the men who will accomplish your transformation. I can change your life by a touch, into convict dress, diet, labour, lodging, for the rest of your days. What plea have you to offer to my mercy?"

Sir Richard would have spoken, but his voice failed him. With a second effort, however, he said—"Would it not be more manly if you let me meet my fate, without this."

"And you are such an admirable judge of what is manly, or even gentlemanlike!" said Longcluse. "Now, mind, I shall arrest you in five minutes, on your three over-due bills. The men with the writ are in the next room. I shan't immediately arrest you for the forgery. That shall hang over you. I mean to make you, for a while, my instrument. Hear, and understand; I mean to marry your sister. She don't like me, but she suits me; I have chosen her, and I'll not be baulked. When that is accomplished you are safe. No man likes to see his brother a spectacle of British justice, with cropped hair, and a log to his foot. I may hate and despise you, as you deserve, but that would not do. Failing that, however, you shall have justice, I promise you. The course I propose taking is this: you shall be arrested here, for *debt*. You will be good enough to allow the people who take you to select your present place of confinement. It is arranged. I will then, by a note, appoint a place of meeting for this evening, where I shall instruct you as to the particulars of that course of conduct I prescribe for you. If you mean to attempt an

escape, you had better try it *now*; I will give you fourteen hours' start, and undertake to catch and bring you back to London as a forger. If you make up your mind to submit to fate, and do precisely as you are ordered, you may emerge. But on the slightest evasion, prevarication, or default, the blow descends. In the meantime we treat each other civilly before these people. Levi is in my hands, and you, I presume, keep your own secret."

"That is all?" inquired Sir Richard faintly, after a minute's silence.

"All for the *present*," was the reply; "you will see more clearly by-and-by that you are my property, and you will act accordingly."

The two Jewish-looking gentlemen whom Richard, had passed, in a conference in their carriage, which stood now at the steps of the house, were the sheriff's officers destined to take charge of the fallen gentleman, and convey him, by Levi's direction, to a "sponging house," which, I believe, belonged jointly to him and his partner, Mr. Goldshed.

It was on the principle, perhaps, on which

hunters tame wild beasts, by a sojourn at the bottom of a pit-fall, that Mr. Longcluse doomed the young Baronet to some ten hours' solitary contemplation of his hopeless immeshment in that castle of Giant Despair, before taking him out and setting him again before him, for the purpose of instructing him in the conditions and duties of the direful life on which he was about to enter.

Mr. Longcluse left the Baronet suddenly, and returned to Levi's office no more.

Sir Richard's *rôle* was cast. He was to figure, at least first, as a captive in the drama for which fate had selected him. He had no wish to retard the progress of the piece. Nothing more odious than his present situation was likely to come.

"You have something to say to me?" said the Baronet, making tender, as it were, of himself. The offer was, obligingly, accepted, and the sheriffs, by his lieutenants, made prisoner of Sir Richard Arden, who strode down the stairs between them, and entered the seedy coach, and sitting as far back as he could, drove rapidly toward the City.

Stunned and confused, there was but one image vividly present to his recollection, and that was the baleful face of Walter Longcluse.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### NIGHT.

AT about eight o'clock that evening a hurried note reached Alice Arden, at Mortlake. It was from her brother, and said—

"My Darling Alice,—I can't get away from town to-night, I am overwhelmed with business; but to-morrow before dinner, I hope to see you, and stay at Mortlake till next morning.

"Your affectionate brother,

"Dick."

The house was quiet earlier than in former times, when Sir Reginald, of rakish memory, was never in his bed till past three o'clock in the morning. Mortlake was an early house now, and all was still by a quarter past eleven. The last candle burning was usually that in

Mrs. Tansey's room. She had not yet gone to bed, and was still in "the housekeeper's room," when a tapping came at the window. It reminded her of Mr. Longcluse's visit on the night of the funeral.

She was now the only person up in the house, except Alice, who was at the far side of the building, where, in the next room, her maid was in bed asleep. Alice, who sat at her dressing-table, reading, with her long rich hair dishevelled over her shoulders, was, of course, quite out of hearing.

Martha went to the window with a little frown of uncertainty. Opening a bit of the shutter, she saw Sir Richard's face close to her. Was ever old housekeeper so pestered by nightly tappings at her window-pane?

"La! who'd a thought o' seeing you, Master Richard! why, you told Miss Alice you'd not be here till to-morrow!" she says pettishly, holding the candle high above her head.

He makes a sign of caution to her, and placing his lips near the pane, says—

"Open the window the least bit in life."

With a dark stare in his face, she obeys. An

odd approach, surely, for a master to make to his own house!

"No one up in the house but you?" he whispers, as soon as the window is open.

"Not one!"

"Don't say a word, only listen: come, softly, round to the hall-door, and let me in; and light those candles there, and bring them with you to the hall. Don't let a creature know I have been here, and make no noise for your life!"

The old woman nodded with the same little frown; and he, pointing toward the hall door, walks away silently in that direction.

"What makes you look so white and dowley?" mutters the old woman, as she secures the window and bars the shutters again.

"Good creature!" whispers Sir Richard, as he enters the hall, and places his hand kindly on her shoulder, and with a very dark look; "you have always been true to me, Martha, and I depend on your good sense; not a word of my having been here, to any one—not to Miss Alice! I have to search for papers. I shall be here but an hour or so. Don't lock or bar the

door, mind, and get to your bed! Don't come up this way again—good night!"

"Won't you have some supper?"

"No, thanks."

"A glass of sherry and a bit o' something?"

"Nothing."

And he places his hand on her shoulder gently, and looks toward the corridor that led to her room; then taking up one of the candles she had left alight on the table in the hall, he says—

"I'll give you a light," and he repeats, with a wondrous heavy sigh, "Good night, dear old Martha."

"God bless ye, Master Dick. Ye must chirp up a bit, mind," she says very kindly, with an earnest look in his face. "I'm getting to rest —ye needn't fear me walkin' about to trouble ye. But ye must be careful to shut the hall-door close. I agree, as it is a thing to be done; but ye must also knock at my bed-room window when ye've gane out, for I must get up, and lock the door, and make a' safe; and don't ye forget, Master Richard, what I tell ye."

He held the candle at the end of the corridor,

down which the wiry old woman went quickly; and when he returned to the hall, and set the candle down again, he felt faint. In his ears are, ever, the terrible words: "Mind, *I* take command of the house, *I* dispose of and appoint the servants; I don't appear, you do all ostensibly —but from garret to cellar, I'm *master*. I'll look it over, and tell you what is to be done."

Sir Richard roused himself, and having listened at the staircase, he very softly opened the hall-door. The spire of the old church showed hoar in the moonlight. At the left, from under a deep shadow of elms, comes silently a tall figure, and softly ascends the hall-door steps. The door is closed gently.

Alice sitting at her dressing-table, half an hour later, thought she heard steps—lowered her book, and listened. But no sound followed. Again the same light foot-falls disturbed her—and again, she was growing nervous. Once more she heard them, very stealthily, and now on the same floor on which her room was. She stands up breathless. There is no noise now. She was thinking of waking her maid, but she remembered that she and Louisa Diaper had in

a like alarm, discovered old Martha, only two or three nights before, poking about the china-closet, dusting and counting, at one o'clock in the morning, and had then exacted a promise that she would visit that repository no more, except at seasonable hours. But old Martha was so pig-headed, and would take it for granted that she was fast asleep, and would rather fidget through the house and poke up everything at that hour than at any other.

Quite persuaded of this, Alice takes her candle, determined to scold that troublesome old thing, against whom she is fired with the irritation that attends on a causeless fright. She walks along the gallery quickly, in slippers, flowing dressing-gown and hair, with her candle in her hand, to the head of the stairs, through the great window of which the moonlight streams brightly. Through the keyhole of the door at the opposite side, a ray of candlelight is visible, and from this room opens the china-closet, which is no doubt the point of attraction for the troublesome visitant. Holding the candle high in her left hand, Alice opens the door.

What she sees is this—a pair of candles burn-

ing on a small table, on which, with a pencil, Mr. Longcluse is drawing, it seems, with care, a diagram; at the same moment he raises his eyes, and Richard Arden, who is standing with one hand placed on the table over which he is leaning a little, looks quickly round, and rising walks straight to the door, interposing between her and Longcluse.

"Oh, Alice? You didn't expect me: I'm very busy, looking for—looking over papers. Don't mind."

He had placed his hands gently on her shoulders, and she receded as he advanced.

"Oh! it don't matter. I thought—I thought —I did not know."

She was smiling her best. She was horrified. He looked like a ghost. Alice was gazing piteously in his face, and with a little laugh, she began to cry convulsively.

"What is the matter with the little fool! There, there—don't, don't—nonsense!"

With an effort she recovered herself.

"Only a little startled, Dick; I did not think you were there—good night."

And she hastened back to her chamber, and

locked the door; and running into her maid's room, sat down on the side of her bed, and wept hysterically. To the imploring inquiries of her maid, she repeated only the words, "I am frightened," and left her in a startled perplexity.

She knew that Longcluse had seen her, and he, that she had seen him. Their eyes had met. He saw with a bleak rage the contracting look of horror, so nearly hatred, that she fixed on him for a breathless moment. There was a tremor of fury at his heart, as if it could have sprung at her, from his breast, at her throat, and murdered her; and—she looked so beautiful! He gazed with an idolatrous admiration. Tears were welling to his eyes, and yet he would have laughed to see her weltering on the floor. A madman for some tremendous seconds!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MEASURES.

ABOUT twelve o'clock next day Richard Arden showed himself at Mortlake. It was a beautiful autumnal day, and the mellow sun fell upon a foliage that was fading into russet and yellow. Alice was looking out from the open window, on the noble old timber whose wide-spread boughs and thinning leaves caught the sunbeams pleasantly. She had heard her brother and his companion go down the stairs, and saw them, from the window, walk quickly down the avenue, till the trees hid them from view. She thought that some of the servants were up, and that the door was secured on their departure; and the effect of the shock

she had received, gradually subsiding, she looked to her next interview with her brother for an explanation of the occurrence which had so startled her.

That interview was approaching; the cab drove up to the steps, and her brother got out. Anxiously she looked, but no one followed him, and the driver shut the cab-door. Sir Richard kissed his hand to her, as she stood in the window.

From the hall the house opens to the right and left, in two suites of rooms. The room in which Alice stood was called the sage-room, from its being hung in sage-green leather, stamped in gold. It is a small room to the left, and would answer very prettily for a card party or a tête-à-tête. Alice had her work, her books, and her music there; she liked it because the room was small and cheery.

The door opened, and her brother comes in.

"Good Dick, to come so early! welcome, darling," she said, putting her arms about his neck, as he stooped and kissed her, smiling.

He looked very ill, and his smile was painful.

"That was an odd little visit I paid last

night," said he, with his dark eyes fixed on her, inquiringly she thought—"very late—quite unexpected. You are quite well to-day?—you look flourishing."

"I wish I could say as much for you, Dick; I'm afraid you are tiring yourself to death."

"I had some one with me last night," said Sir Richard, with his eye still upon her; "I—I don't know whether you perceived that."

Alice looked away, and then said carelessly, but very gravely—

"I did—I saw Mr. Longcluse. I could not believe my eyes, Dick. You must promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"That he shan't come into this house any more—while I am here, I mean."

"That is easily promised," said he.

"And what did he come about, Dick?"

"Oh! he came—he came—I thought I told you; he came about papers. I did not tell you; but he has, after all, turned out very friendly. He is going to do me a very important service."

She looked very much surprised.

The young man glanced through the window,

to which he walked; he seemed embarrassed, and then turning to her, he said peevishly—

"You seem to think, Alice, that one can never make a mistake, or change an opinion."

"But I did not say so; only, Dick, I must tell you that I have such a horror of that man—a *terror* of him—as nothing can ever get over."

"I'm to blame for that."

"No, I can't say you are. I don't mind stories so much as——"

"As what?"

"As looks."

"Looks! Why, you used to think him a gentlemanly-looking fellow, and so he is."

"Looks *and language*," said Alice.

"I thought he was a very civil fellow."

"I shan't dispute anything. I suppose you have found him a good friend, after all, as you say."

"As good a friend as most men," said Sir Richard, growing pale; "they all act from interest: where interests are the same, men are friends. But he has saved me from a great deal, and he may do more; and I believe I was too hasty about those stories, and I think you were

right when you refused to believe them without proof."

"I dare say—I don't know—I believe my senses—and all I say is this, if Mr. Longcluse is to come here any more, I must go. He is no gentleman, I think—that is, I can't describe how I dislike him—how I hate him! I'm afraid of him! Dick, you look ill and unhappy: what's the matter?"

"I'm well enough—I'm better; we shall be better—all better by-and-by. I wish the next five weeks were over! We must leave this, we must go to Arden Court; I will send some of the servants there first. I am going to tell them now, they must get the house ready. You shall keep your maid here with you; and when all is ready in Yorkshire, we shall be off—Alice, Alice, don't mind me—I'm miserable—mad!" he says suddenly, and covers his face with his hands, and, for the first time for years, he is crying bitter tears.

Alice was by his side, alarmed, curious, grieved; and with all these emotions mingling in her dark eyes and beautiful features, as she drew

his hand gently away, with a rush of affectionate entreaties aad inquiries.

"It is all very fine, Alice," he exclaims, with a sudden bitterness; "but I don't believe, to save me from destruction, you would sacrifice one of your least caprices, or reconcile one of your narrowest prejudices."

"What can you mean, dear Richard? only tell me how I can be of any use. You can't mean, of course——"

She stops with a startled look at him. "You know, dear Dick, that was always out of the question; and surely you have heard that Lord Wynderbroke is to be married to Grace Maubray? It is all settled."

Quite another thought had been in Richard's mind, but he was glad to accept Alice's conjecture.

"Yes, so it is—so, at least, it is said to be—but I am so worried and distracted, I half forget things. Girls are such jolly fools; they throw good men away, and lose themselves. What is to become of you, Alice, if things go wrong with me! I think the old times were best, when the old people settled who was to

marry whom, and there was no disputing their decision, and marriages were just as happy, and courtships a great deal simpler; and I am very sure there were fewer secret repinings, and broken hearts, and—threadbare old maids. Don't *you* be a fool, Alice; mind what I say."

He is leaving the room, but pauses at the door, and returns, and places his hand on her arm, looking in her face, and says—

"Yes, mind what I say, for God's sake, and we may all be a great deal happier."

He kisses her, and is gone. Her eyes follow him, as she thinks with a sigh—

"How strange Dick is growing! I'm afraid he has been playing again, and losing. It must have been something very urgent that induced him to make it up again with that low, malignant man; and this break-up, and journey to Arden Court! I think I should prefer being there. There is something ominous about this place, picturesque as it is, and much as I like it. But the journey to Yorkshire is only another of the imaginary excursions Dick has been proposing every fortnight; and next year, and the

year after, will find us, I suppose, just where we are."

But this conjecture, for once, was mistaken. It was, this time, a veritable break-up and migration; for Martha Tansey came in, with the importance of a person who has a matter of moment to talk over.

"Here's something sudden, Miss Alice; I suppose you've heard. Off to Arden Court in the mornin'. Crozier, and me: the footman discharged, and you to follow with Master Richard in a week."

"Oh, then, it *is* settled. Well, Martha, I am not sorry, and I dare say you and Crozier won't be sorry to see old Yorkshire faces again, and the Court, and the rookery, and the orchard."

"I don't mind; glad enough to see a'ad faces, but I'm a bit o'er a'ad myself for such sudden flittins, and Manx and Darwent, and the rest, is to go by night train to-morrow, and not a housemaid left in Mortlake. But Master Richard says a's provided, and 'twill be but a few days after a's done; and ye'll be down, then, at Arden by the middle o' next week, and I'm no sa sure the change mayn't serve ye; and as

your uncle, Master David, and Lady May Penrose, and Miss Maubray—a strackle-brained lass she is, I doubt—and to think o' that a'ad fule, Lord Wynderbroke, takin' sich a young, bonny hizzy to wife! La bless ye! she'll play the hangment wi' that a'ad gowk of a lord, and all his goold guineas won't do. His kist o' money won't hod na time, I warrant ye, when once that lassie gets her pretty fingers under the lid. There'll be gaains on in that house, I warrant, not but he's a gude man, and a fine gentleman as need be," she added, remembering her own strenuous counsel in his favour, when he was supposed to be paying his court to Alice; "and if he was mated wi' a gude lassie, wi' gude blude in her veins, would doubtless keep as honourable a house, and hod his head as high as any lord o' them a'. But as I was saying, Miss Alice, now that Master David, and Lady May, and Miss Maubray, has left Lunnon, there's no one here to pay ye a visit, and ye'd be fairly buried alive here in Mortlake, and ye'll be better, and sa will we a', down at Arden, for a bit; and there's gentle folk down there as gude as ever rode in Lunnon streets, mayhap, and bet-

ter; and mony a squire, that ony leddy in the land might be proud to marry, and not one but would be glad to match wi' an Arden."

"That is a happy thought," said Alice, laughing.

"And so it is, and no laughing matter," said Martha, a little offended, as she stalked out of the room, and closed the door, grandly, after her.

"And God bless you, dear old Martha," said the young lady, looking towards the door through which she had just passed; "the truest and kindest soul on earth."

Sir Richard did not come back. She saw him no more that evening.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### AT THE BAR OF THE "GUY OF WARWICK."

NEXT evening there came, not Richard, but a note saying that he would see Alice the moment he could get away from town. As the old servant departed northward, her solitude for the first time began to grow irksome, and as the night approached, worse even than gloomy.

Her extemporised household made her laugh. It was not even a skeleton establishment. The kitchen department had dwindled to a single person, who ordered her luncheon and dinner, only two or three *plats*, daily, from the "Guy of Warwick." The housemaid's department was undertaken by a single servant, a short, strong woman of some sixty years of age.

This person puzzled Alice a good deal. She

came to her, like the others, with a note from her brother, stating her name, and that he had engaged her for the few days they meant to remain roughing it at Mortlake, and that he had received a very good account of her.

This woman has not a bad countenance. There is, indeed, no tenderness in it; but there is a sort of hard good-humour. There are quickness and resolution. She talks fluently of herself and her qualifications, and now and then makes a short curtsey. But she takes no notice of any one of Alice's questions.

A silence sometimes follows, during which Alice repeats her interrogatory perhaps twice, with growing indignation, and then the new comer breaks into a totally independent talk, and leaves the young lady wondering at her disciplined impertinence. It was not till her second visit that she enlightened her.

"I did not send for you. You can go!" said Alice.

"I don't like a house that has children in it, they gives a deal o' trouble," said the woman.

"But I say you may go; you must go, please."

The woman looked round the room.

"When I was with Mrs. Montgomery, she had five, three girls and two boys; la! there never was five such——"

"Go, this moment, please, I insist on your going; do you hear me, pray?"

But so far from answering, or obeying, this cool intruder continues her harangue before Miss Arden gets half way to the end of her little speech.

"That woman was the greatest fool alive—nothing but spoiling and petting—I could not stand it no longer, so I took Master Tommy by the lug, and pulled him out of the kitchen, the limb, along the passage to the stairs, every inch, and I gave him a slap in the face, the fat young rascal; you could hear all over the house! and didn't he rise the roof! So missus and me, we quarrelled upon it."

"If you don't leave the room, *I* must; and I shall tell my brother, Sir Richard, how you have behaved yourself; and you may rely upon it——"

But here again she is overpowered by the strong voice of her visitor.

"It was in my next place, at Mr. Crump's, I

took cold in my head, very bad, miss, indeed, looking out of window to see two fellows fighting, in the lane—in both ears—and so I lost my hearing, and I've been deaf as a post ever since!"

Alice could not resist a laugh at her own indignant eloquence quite thrown away; and she hastily wrote with a pencil on a slip of paper:

"Please don't come to me except when I send for you."

"La! ma'am, I forgot!" exclaims the woman, when she had examined it; "my orders was not to read any of *your* writing."

"Not to read any of my writing!" said Alice, amazed; "then, how am I to tell you what I wish about anything?" she inquires, for the moment forgetting that not one word of her question was heard. The woman makes a curtsey and retires. "What can Richard have meant by giving her such a direction? I'll ask him when he comes."

It was likely enough that the woman had misunderstood him, still she began to wish the little interval destined to be passed at Mortlake before her journey to Yorkshire, ended.

She told her maid, Louisa Diaper, to go down to the kitchen and find out all she could as to what people were in the house, and what duties they had undertaken, and when her brother was likely to arrive.

Louisa Diaper, slim, elegant, and demure, descended among these barbarous animals. She found in the kitchen, unexpectedly, a male stranger, a small, slight man, with great black eyes, a big sullen mouth, a sallow complexion, and a profusion of black ringlets. The deaf woman was conning over some writing of his on a torn-off blank leaf of a letter, and he was twiddling about the pencil, with which he had just traced it, in his fingers, and, in a singing drawl, holding forth to the other woman, who, with a long and high canvas apron on, and the handle of an empty saucepan in her right hand, stood gaping at him, with her arms hanging by her sides.

On the appearance of Miss Diaper, Mr. Levi, for he it was, directs his solemn conversation to that young lady.

"I was just telling them about the robberies in the City and Wesht Hend. La! there'sh bin nothin' like it for twenty year. They don't tell

them in the papersh, blesh ye! The 'ome Shecretary takesh precious good care o' that; they don't want to frighten every livin' shoul out of London. But there'll be talk of it in Parliament, I promish you. I know three opposition membersh myshelf that will move the 'oushe upon it next session."

Mr. Levi wagged his head darkly as he made this political revelation.

"Thish day twel'month the number o' burglariesh in London and the Wesht Hend, including Hizhlington, was no more than fifteen and a half a night; and two robberiesh attended with wiolensh. What wazh it lasht night? I have it in confidensh, from the polishe offish thish morning."

He pulled a pocket-book, rather greasy, from his breast, and from this depositary, it is to be presumed, of statistical secrets, he read the following official memorandum:—

"Number of 'oushes burglarioushly hentered lasht night, including private banksh, charitable hinshtitutions, shops, lodging-'oushes, female hacadamies, and private dwellings, and robbed with more or less wiolensh, one thoushand

sheven hundred and shixty-sheven. We regret to hadd," he continued, the official return stealing, as it proceeded, gradually into the style of "The Pictorial Calendar of British Crime," a halfpenny paper which he took in—"this hinundation of crime seems flowing, or raythe rushing northward, and hazh already enweloped Hizhlington, where a bald-headed clock and watch maker, named Halexander Goggles, wazh murdered, together with his sheven shmall children, with unigshampled ba-arba-arity."

Mr. Levi eyed the women horribly all round as he ended the sentence, and he added—

"Hizhlington'sh only down there. It ain't five minutesh walk; only a pleasant shtep; just enough to give a fellow azh has polished off a family there a happetite for another up here. Azh I 'ope to be shaved, I shleep every night with a pair of horshe pishtols, a blunderbush, and a shabre by my bed; and Shir Richard wantsh every door in the 'oushe fasht locked, and the keysh with him, before dark, thish evening, except only such doors as you want open; and he gave me a note to Miss Harden." And he placed the note in Miss Diaper's hand. "He

wantsh the 'oushe a bit more shecure," he added, following her towards the hall. "He wishes to make you and she quite shafe, and out of harm's way, if anything should occur. It will be only a few days, you know, till you're both away."

The effect of this little alarm, accompanied by Sir Richard's note, was that Mr. Levi carried out a temporary arrangement, which assigned the suite of apartments in which Alice's room was as those to which she would restrict herself during the few days she was to remain there, the rest of the house, except the kitchen and a servant's room or two downstairs, being locked up.

By the time Mr. Levi had got the keys together, and all safe in Mortlake, the sun had set, and in the red twilight that followed he set off in his cab towards town. At the "Guy of Warwick"—from the bar of which already was flaring a good broad gas-light—he stopped and got out. There was a full view of the bar from where he stood; and, pretending to rummage his pockets for something, he was looking in to see whether "the coast was clear."

"She's just your sort—not too bad and not too good—not too nashty, and not too nishe; a good-humoured lash, rough and ready, and knowsh a thing or two."

"Ye're there, are ye?" inquired Mr. Levi, playfully, as he crossed the door-stone, and placed his fists on the bar grinning.

"What will you take, sir, please?" inquired the young woman, at one side of whom was the usual row of taps and pump-handles.

"Now, Miss Phœbe, give me a brandy and shoda, pleashe. When I talked to you in thish 'ere place 'tother night, you wished to engage for a lady's maid. What would you shay to me, if I was to get you a firsht-chop tip-top pla-ashe of the kind? Well, don't you shay a word—that brandy ain't fair measure—and I'll tell you. It'sh a la-ady of ra-ank! where wagesh ish no-o object; and two years' savings, and a good match with a well-to-do 'andsome young fellow, will set you hup in a better place than this 'ere."

"It comes very timely, sir, for I'm to leave to-morrow, and I was thinking of going home to my uncle in a day or two, in Chester."

"Well it's all settled. Come you down to my offishe, you know where it is, to-morrow at three, and I'll 'av all particklars for you, and a note to the lady from her brother, the baronet; and if you be a good girl, and do as you're bid, you'll make a little fortune of it."

She curtsied, with her eyes very round, as he, with a wag of his head, drank down what remained of his brandy and soda, and wiping his mouth with his glove, he said, "three o'clock sha-arp, mind; good-bye, Phœbe, lass, and don't you forget all I said."

He stood ungallantly with his back towards her on the threshold lighting a cigar, and so soon as he had it, in his own phrase, "working at high blast," he got into his cab, and jingled towards his office, with all his keys about him.

While Miss Arden remained all unconscious, and even a little amused at the strange shifts to which her brief stay and extemporised household at Mortlake exposed her, a wily and determined strategist was drawing his toils around her.

The process of isolation was nearly completed, without having once excited her suspicions;

and, with the same perfidious skill, the house itself was virtually undergoing those modifications which best suited his designs.

Sir Richard appeared at his club as usual. He was compelled to do so. The all-seeing eye of his pale tyrant pursued him everywhere; he lived under terror. A dreadful agony all this time convulsed the man, within whose heart Longcluse suspected nothing but the serenity of death.

"What easier than to tell the story to the police. Meditated duresse. Compulsion. Infernal villain! And then: what then? A pistol to his head, a flash, and—darkness!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### A LETTER.

MR. LONGCLUSE knocked at Sir Richard's house in May Fair, and sent upstairs for the Baronet. It was about the same hour at which Mr. Levi was drinking his thirsty potation of brandy and soda at the "Guy of Warwick." The streets were darker than that comparatively open place, and the gas lamp threw its red outline of the sashes upon the dark ceiling, as Mr. Longcluse stood in the drawing-room between the windows, in his great-coat, with his hat on, looking in the dark like an image made of fog.

Sir Richard Arden entered the room.

"You were not at Mortlake to-day," said he.

"No."

"There's a cab at the door that will take you there; your absence for a whole day would excite surmise. Don't stay more than five minutes, and don't mention Louisa Diaper's name, and account for the locking up of all the house, but one suite of rooms, I directed, and come to my house in Bolton Street, direct from Mortlake. That's all."

Without another word, Mr. Longcluse took his departure.

In this cavalier way, and in a cold tone that conveyed all the menace and insult involved in his ruined position, had this conceited young man been ordered about by his betrayer, on his cruel behests, ever since he had come under his dreadful rod. The iron trap that held him fast, locked him in a prison from which, except through the door of death, there seemed no escape.

Outraged pride, the terrors of suspense, the shame and remorse of his own enormous perfidy against his only sister, peopled it with spectres.

As he drove out to Mortlake, pale, frowning,

with folded arms, his handsome face thinned and drawn by the cords of pain, he made up his mind. He knocked furiously at Mortlake Hall door. The woman in the canvas apron let him in. The strange face startled him; he had been thinking so intently of one thing. Going up, through the darkened house, with but one candle, and tapping at the door, on the floor above the drawing-room, within which Alice was sitting, with Louisa Diaper for company, and looking at her unsuspicious smile, he felt what a heinous conspirator he was.

He made an excuse for sending the maid to the next room after they had spoken a few words, and then he said—

"Suppose, Alice, we were to change our plan, would you like to come abroad? Out of this you must come immediately." He was speaking low. "I am in great danger; I must go abroad. For your life, don't seem to suspect anything. Do exactly as I tell you, or else I am utterly ruined, and you, Alice, on your own account, very miserable. Don't ask a question, or look a look, that may make Louisa Diaper suspect that you have any doubt as to your go-

ing to Arden, or any suspicion of any danger. She is quite true, but not wise, and your left hand must not know what your right hand is doing. Don't be frightened, only be steady and calm. Get together any jewels and money you have, and as little else as you can possibly manage with. Do this yourself; Louisa Diaper must know nothing of it. I will mature our plans, and to-morrow or next day I shall see you again; I can stay but a moment now, and have but time to bid you good-night."

Then he kissed her. How horribly agitated he looked! How cold was the pressure of his hand!

"Hush!" he whispered, and his dark eyes were fixed on the door through which he expected the return of the maid. And as he heard her step, "Not a word, remember!" he said; then bidding her good-night aloud, he quitted the room almost as suddenly as he had appeared, leaving her, for the first time, in the horrors of a growing panic.

Sir Richard leaned back in the cab as he drove into town. He had as yet no plan formed. It was a more complicated exploit than he was at

the moment equal to. In Mortlake were two fellows, by way of protectors, placed there for security of the house and people.

These men held possession of the keys of the house, and sat and regaled themselves with their hot punch, or cold brandy and water, and pipes; always one awake, and with ears erect, they kept watch and ward in the room to the right of the hall-door, in which Sir Richard and Uncle David had conversed with the sad Mr. Plumes, on the evening after the old Baronet's death. To effect Alice's escape, and reserve for himself a chance of accomplishing his own, was a problem demanding skill, cunning, and audacity.

While he revolved these things an alarm had been sounded in another quarter, which unexpectedly opened a chance of extrication, sudden and startling.

Mr. Longcluse was destined to a surprise to-night. Mr. Longcluse, at his own house, was awaiting the return of Sir Richard. Overlooked in his usually accurate though rapid selection, a particularly shabby and vulgar-looking letter had been thrown aside among circulars,

pamphlets, and begging letters, to await his leisure. It was a letter from Paris, and vulgar and unbusiness-like as it looked, there was yet, in its peculiar scrivenery that which, a little more attentively scanned, thrilled him with a terrible misgiving. The post-mark showed it had been delivered four days before. When he saw from whom it came, and had gathered something of its meaning from a few phrases, his dark eyes gleamed and his face grew stern. Was this wretch's hoof to strike to pieces the plans he had so nearly matured? The letter was as follows:—

"SIR,—Mr. Longcluse, I have been unfortunate With your money which you have Gave me to remove from England, and Keep me in New York. My boxes, and other things, and Ballens of the money in Gold, except about a Hundred pounds, which has kep me from want ever sense, went Down in the Mary Jane, of London, and my cusin went down in her also, which I miht as well av Went down myself in her, only for me Stopping in Paris, where I madeja triffle of Money, intending to go Out in August. Now, sir, don't you Seppose I am not in as good Possition as I was when I Harranged with sum difculty With you. The boot with The blood Mark on the Soul is not Lost nor Distroyed, but it is Safe in my Custody; so as Likewise in safe Keeping is The traising, in paper, of the foot Mark in blood on the Floar of the Smoaking Room in question,

with the signatures of the witnesses attached; and, Moreover, my Staitment made in the Form of a Information, at the Time, and signed In witness of My signature by two Unekseptinible witnesses. And all Is ready to Produise whenevor his worshop shall Apoynt. i have wrote To mister david Arden on this Supget. i wrote to him just a week ago, he seaming To take a Intrast in this Heer case; and, moreover, The two ieyes that sawd a certain Person about the said smoaking Room, and in the saime, is Boath wide open at This presen Time. mister Longcluse i do not Want to have your Life, but gustice must Taike its coarse unless it is settled of hand Slik. i will harrange the Same as last time, And i must have two hundred And fifty pounds More on this Setlemant then i Had last time, for Dellay and loss of Time in this town. I will sign any law paper in reason you may ask of me. My hadress is under cover to Monseer Letexier, air-dresser, and incloses his card, which you Will please send an Anser by return Of post, or else i Must sepose you chose The afare shall take Its coarse; and i am as ever,

"Your obeediant servent to comand,

"PAUL DAVIES."

Never did paper look so dazzlingly white, or letters so intensely black, before Mr. Longcluse's eyes, as those of this ominous letter. He crumpled it up, and thrust it in his trousers pocket, and gave to the position a few seconds of intense thought.

His first thought was, what a fool he was for not having driven Davies to the wall, and

settled the matter with the high hand of the the law, at once. His next, what could bring him to Paris? He was there for something. To see, possibly, the family of Lebas, and collect and dovetail pieces of evidence, after his detective practice, a process which would be sure to conduct him to the Baron Vanboeren! Was this story of the boot and the tracing of the blood-stained foot-print true? Had this scoundrel reserved the strongest part of his case for this new extortion? Was his trouble to be never-ending? If this accursed ferret were once to get into his warren, what power could unearth him, till the mischief was done?

His eye caught again the words, on which, in the expressive phrase which Mr. Davies would have used, his "sight spred" as he held the letter before his eyes—"Mister Longcluse, i do not Want to have your life." He ground his teeth, shook his fist in the air, and stamped on the floor with fury, at the thought that a brutal detective, not able to spell two words, and trained for such game as London thieves and burglars, should dare to hold such language to a man of thought and skill, altogether so mas-

terly as he! That he should be outwitted by that clumsy scoundrel!

Well, it was now to begin all over again. It should all go right this time. He thought again for a moment, and then sat down and wrote, commencing with the date and address—

"PAUL DAVIES,—I have just received your note, which states that you have succeeded in obtaining some additional information, which you think may lead to the conviction of the murderer of M. Lebas, in the Saloon Tavern. I shall be most happy to pay handsomely any expense of any kind you may be put to in that matter. It is, indeed, no more than I had already undertaken. I am glad to learn that you have also written on the subject to Mr. David Arden, who feels entirely with me. I shall take an early opportunity of seeing him. Persist in your laudable exertions, and I shall not shrink from rewarding you handsomely.—Yours,

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

He addressed the letter carefully, and went himself and put it in the post-office.

By this time Sir Richard Arden was awaiting him at home in his drawing-room, and as he walked homeward, under the lamps, in inward pain, one might have moralised with Peter Pindar—

"These fleas have other fleas to bite 'em,
And so on *ad infinitum*."

The secret tyrant had in his turn found a secret tyrant, not less cruel perhaps, but more ignoble.

"You made your visit?" asked Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes."

"Anything to report?"

"Absolutely nothing."

A silence followed.

"Where is Mr. Arden, your uncle?"

"In Scotland."

"How soon does he return?"

"He will not be in town till spring, I believe; he is going abroad, but he passes through Southampton on his way to the Continent, on Friday next."

"And makes some little stay there?"

"I think he stays one night."

"Then I'll go down and see him, and you shall come with me."

Sir Richard stared.

"Yes, and you had better not put your foot in it; and clear your head of all notion of running away," he said, fixing his fiery eyes on Sir Richard, with a sudden ferocity that made

him fancy that his secret thoughts had revealed themselves under that piercing gaze. "It is not easy to levant now-a-days, unless one has swifter wings than the wires can carry news with; and if you are false, what more do I need than to blast you? and with your name in the *Hue-and-cry*, and a thousand pounds reward for the apprehension of Sir Richard Arden, Baronet, for forgery, I don't see much more that infamy can do for you."

A dark flush crossed Arden's face as he rose.

"Not a word now," cried Longcluse harshly, extending his hand quickly towards him; "I may do that which can't be undone."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### BLIGHT AND CHANGE.

DANGER to herself, Alice suspected none. But she was full of dreadful conjectures about her brother. There was, she was persuaded, no good any longer in remonstrance or entreaty. She could not upbraid him; but she was sure that the terrible fascination of the gaming-table had caused the sudden ruin he vaguely confessed.

"Oh," she often repeated, "that Uncle David were in town, or that I knew where to find him!"

"But no doubt," she thought, "Richard will hide nothing from him, and perhaps my hinting his disclosures, even to him, would aggravate poor Richard's difficulties and misery."

It was not until the next evening that, about the same hour, she again saw her brother. His good resolutions in the interval had waxed faint. They were not reversed, but only, in the spirit of indecision, and something of the apathy of despair, postponed to a more convenient season.

To her he seemed more tranquil. He said vaguely that the reasons for flight were less urgent, and that she had better continue her preparations, as before, for her journey to Yorkshire.

Even under these circumstances the journey to Yorkshire was pleasant. There was comfort in the certainty that he would there be beyond the reach of that fatal temptation which had too plainly all but ruined him. From the harassing distractions, also, which in London had of late beset him, almost without intermission, he might find in the seclusion of Arden a temporary calm. There, with Uncle David's help, there would be time, at least, to ascertain the extent of his losses, and what the old family of Arden might still count upon as their own,

and a plan of life might be arranged for the future.

Full of these more cheery thoughts, Alice took leave of her brother.

"I am going," he said, looking at his watch, "direct to Brighton; I have just time to get to the station nicely; business, of course—a meeting to-night with Bexley, who is staying there, and in the morning a long and, I fear, angry discussion with Charrington, who is also at Brighton."

He kissed his sister, sighed deeply, and looking in her eyes for a little, fixedly, he said—

"Alice, darling, you must try to think what sacrifice you can make to save your wretched brother."

Their eyes met as she looked up, her hands about his neck, his on her shoulders; he drew his sister to him quickly, and, with another kiss, turned, ran downstairs, got into his cab, and drove down the avenue. She stood looking after him with a heavy heart. How happy they two might have been, if it had not been for the one incorrigible insanity!

About an hour later, as the sun was near its

setting, she put on her hat and short grey cloak, and stepped out into its level beams, and looked round smiling. The golden glow and transparent shadows made that beautiful face look more than ever lovely. All around the air was ringing with the farewell songs of the small birds, and, with a heart almost rejoicing in sympathy with that beautiful hour, she walked lightly to the old garden, which, in that luminous air, looked, she thought, so sad and pretty.

The well-worn aphorism of the Frenchman, "History repeats itself," was about to assert itself. Sometimes it comes in literal sobriety, sometimes in derisive travesti, sometimes in tragic aggravation.

She is in the garden now. The associations of place recall her strange interview with Mr. Longcluse but a few months before. Since then a blight has fallen on the scenery, and what a change upon the persons! The fruit-leaves are yellow now, and drifts of them lie upon the walks. Mantling ivy, as before, canopies the door, interlaced with climbing roses; but they have long shed their honours. This thick mass

of dark green foliage and thorny tendrils forms a deep arched porch, in the shadow of which, suddenly, as on her return she reached it, she sees Mr. Longcluse standing within a step or two of her.

He raises his hand, it might be in entreaty, it might be in menace; she could not, in the few alarmed moments in which she gazed at his dark eyes and pale equivocal face, determine anything.

"Miss Arden, you may hate me; you can't despise me. You *must* hear me, because you are in my power. I relent, mind you, thus far, that I give you one chance more of reconciliation; don't, for God's sake, throw it from you!" (he was extending his open hand to receive hers). "Why should you prefer an unequal war with me? I tell you frankly you are in my power—don't misunderstand me—in *my power* to this degree, that you shall *voluntarily*, as the more tolerable of two alternatives, submit with abject acquiescence to every one of my conditions. Here is my hand; think of the degradation I submit to in asking you to take it. You gave me no chance when I asked forgiveness. I

tender you a full forgiveness; here is my hand, beware how you despise it."

Fearful as he appeared in her sight, her fear gave way before her kindling spirit. She had stood before him pale as death—anger now fired her eye and cheek.

"How dare you, sir, hold such language to me? Do you suppose, if I had told my brother of your cowardice and insolence as I left the Abbey the other day, you would have dared to speak to him, much less to me? Let me pass, and never while you live presume to address me more."

Mr. Longcluse, with a slow recoil, smiling fixedly, and bowing, drew back and opened the door for her to pass. He did not any longer look like a villain whose heart had failed him.

Her heart fluttered violently with fear as she saw that he stepped out after her, and walked by her side toward the house. She quickened her pace in great alarm.

"If you had liked me ever so little," said he in that faint and horrible tone she remembered —"one, the smallest particle, of disinterested liking—the grain of mustard-seed—I would

have had you fast, and made you happy, made you *adore* me; *such* adoration that you could have heard from my own lips the confession of my crimes, and loved me still—loved me more desperately. Now that you hate me, and I hate *you*, and have you in my power, and while I hate still admire you—still choose you for my wife—you shall hear the same story, and think me all the more dreadful. You sought to degrade me, and I'll humble you in the dust. Suppose I tell you I'm a criminal—the kind of man you have read of in trials, and can't understand, and can scarcely even believe in—the kind of man that seems to you as unaccountable and monstrous as a ghost—your terrors and horror will make my triumph exquisite with an immense delight. I don't want to smooth the way for you; you do nothing for me. I disdain hypocrisy. Terror drives you on; fate coerces you; you can't help yourself, and my delight is to make the plunge terrible. I reveal myself that you may know the sort of person you are yoked to. Your sacrifice shall be the agony of agonies, the death of deaths, and yet you'll find yourself unable to resist. I'll

make you submissive as ever patient was to a mad doctor. If it took years to do it, you shall never stir out of this house till it is done. Every spark of insolence in your nature shall be trampled out; I'll break you thoroughly. The sound of my step shall make your heart jump; a look from me shall make you dumb for an hour. You shall not be able to take your eyes off me while I'm in sight, or to forget me for a moment when I am gone. The smallest thing you do, the least word you speak, the very thoughts of your heart, shall all be shaped under one necessity and one fear." (She had reached the hall door.) "Up the steps! Yes; you wish to enter? Certainly."

With flashing eyes and head erect the beautiful girl stepped into the hall, without looking to the right or to the left, or uttering one word, and walked quickly to the foot of the great stair.

If she thought that Mr. Longcluse would respect the barrier of the threshold she was mistaken. He entered but one step behind her, shut the heavy hall door with a crash, dropped the key into his coat pocket, and signing with

his finger to the man in the room to the right, that person stood up briskly, and prepared for action. He closed the door again, saying simply, "I'll call."

The young lady, hearing his step, turned round and stood on the stair, confronting him fiercely.

"You must leave this house this moment," she cried, with a stamp, with gleaming eyes and very pale.

"By-and-by," he replied, standing before her.

Could this be the safe old house in which childish days had passed, in which all around were always friendly and familiar faces? The window stood reflected upon the wall beside her in dim sunset light, and the shadows of the flowers sharp and still that stood there.

"I have friends here who will turn you out, sir!"

"You have *no* friends here," he replied with the same fixed smile.

She hesitated; she stepped down, but stopped in the hall. She remembered instantly that, as she turned, she had seen him take the key from the hall door.

"My brother will protect me."

"Is he here?"

"He'll call you to account to-morrow, when he comes."

"Will he say so?"

"Always—brave, true Richard!" she sobbed with a strange cry in her words.

"He'll do as I bid him: he's a forger, in my power."

To her wild stare he replied with a low faint laugh. She clasped her fingers over her temples.

"Oh! no, no, no, no, no, no!" she screamed and suddenly she rushed into the great room at her right. Her brother—was it a phantom?—stood before her. With one long, shrill scream she threw herself into his arms and cried, "It's a lie, darling, it's a lie!" and she had fainted.

He laid her in the great chair by the fire place. With white lips and with one fist shaking wildly in the air, he said, with a dreadful shiver in his voice—

"You villain! you villain! you villain!"

"Don't you be a fool," said Longcluse. "Ring for the maid. There must have been a crisi

some time. I'm giving you a fair chance—trying to save you; they all faint—it's a trick with women."

Longcluse looked into her lifeless face, with something of pity and horror mingling in the villany of his countenance.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### PHŒBE CHIFFINCH.

MR. LONGCLUSE passed into the inner room, as he heard a step approaching from the hall. It was Louisa Diaper, in whose care, with the simple remedy of cold water, the young lady recovered. She was conveyed to her room, and Richard Arden followed, at Longcluse's command, to "keep things quiet."

In an agony of remorse, he remained with his sister's hand in his, sitting by the bed on which she lay. Longcluse had spoken with the resolution that a few sharp and short words should accomplish the crisis, and show her plainly that her brother was, in the most literal and terrible sense, in his power, and thus, in-

directly, she also. Perhaps, if she must know the fact, it was as well she should know it now.

Longcluse, I suppose, had reckoned upon Richard's throwing himself upon his sister's mercy. He thought he had done so before, and moved her as he would have wished. Longcluse, no doubt, had spoken to her, expecting to find her in a different mood. Had she yielded, what sort of husband would he have made her? Not cruel, I dare say. Proud of her, he would have been. She should have had the best diamonds in England. Jealous, violent when crossed, but with all his malice and severity, easily by Alice to have been won, had she cared to win him, to tenderness.

Was Sir Richard now seconding his scheme?

Sir Richard had no plan—none for escape, none for a catastrophe, none for acting upon Alice's feelings.

"I am so agitated—in such despair, so stunned! If I had but one clear hour! Oh, God! if I had but one clear hour to think in!"

He was now trying to persuade Alice that Longcluse had, in his rage, used exaggerated

language—that it was true he was in his power, but it was for a large sum of money, for which he was his debtor.

"Yes, darling," he whispered, "only be firm. I shall get away, and take you with me—only be secret, and don't mind one word he says when he is angry—he is literally a madman; there is no limit to the violence and absurdity of what he says."

"Is he still in the house?" she whispered.

"Not he."

"Are you certain?"

"Perfectly; with all his rant, he dares not stay: it would be a police-office affair. He's gone long ago."

"Thank God!" she said with a shudder.

Their agitated talk continued for some time longer. At last, darkly and suddenly, as usual, he took his leave.

When her brother had gone, she touched the bell for Louisa Diaper. A stranger appeared.

The stranger had a great deal of pink ribbon in her cap, she looked shrewd enough, and with a pair of rather good eyes; she looked curiously and steadily on the young lady.

"Who are you?" said Alice, sitting up. "I rang for my maid, Louisa Diaper."

"Please, my lady," she answers, with a short curtesy, "she went into town to fetch some things here from Sir Richard's house."

"How long ago?"

"Just when you was getting better, please, my lady."

"When she returns send her to me. What is your name?"

"Phœbe Chiffinch, please 'm."

"And you are here——"

"In her place, please my lady."

"Well, when she comes back you can assist. We shall have a great deal to do, and I like your face, Phœbe, and I'm so lonely, I think I'll get you to sit here in the window near me."

And on a sudden the young lady burst into tears, and sobbed and wept bitterly.

The new maid was at her side, pouring all sorts of consolation into her ear, with odd phrases—quite intelligible, I dare say, over the bar of the "Guy of Warwick"—dropping h's in all directions, and bowling down grammatic rules like nine-pins.

She was wonderfully taken by the kind looks and tones of the pretty lady whom she saw in this distress, and with the silk curtains drawn back in the fading flush of evening.

Hard work, hard fare, and harder words had been her portion from her orphaned childhood upward, at the old "Guy of Warwick," with its dubious customers, failing business, and bitter and grumbling old hostess. Shrewd, hard, and not over-nice had Miss Phœbe grown up in that godless school.

But she had taken a fancy, as the phrase is, to the looks of the young lady, and still more to her voice and words, that in her ears sounded so new and strange. There was not a unpleasant sense, too, of the superiority of rank and refinement which inspires an admiring awe in her kind; and so, in a voice that was rather sweet and very cheery, she offered, when the young lady was better, to sit by the bed and tell her a story, or sing her a song.

Every one knows how his view of his own case may vary within an hour. Alice was now of opinion that there was no reason to reject her brother's version of the terrifying situation.

A man who could act like Mr. Longcluse, could, of course, say anything. She had begun to grow more cheerful, and in a little while she accepted the offer of her companion, and heard, first a story, and then a song; and, after that, she talked with her for some time.

"Tell me, now, what servants there are in the house," asked Alice.

"Only two women and myself, please, miss."

"Is there any one else in the house, besides ourselves?"

The girl looked down, and up again, in Alice's eyes, and then away to the floor at the other end of the room.

"I was told, ma'am, not to talk of nothing here, miss, except my own business, please, my lady."

"My God! This girl mayn't speak truth to me," exclaimed Alice, clasping her hands aghast.

The girl looked up uneasily.

"I should be sent away, ma'am, if I do."

"Look—listen: in this strait you must be for or against me; you can't be divided. For

God's sake be a friend to me now. I may yet be the best friend you ever had. Come, Phœbe, trust me, and I'll never betray you."

She took the girl's hand. Phœbe did not speak. She looked in her face earnestly for some moments, and then down, and up again.

"I don't mind. I'll do what I can for you, ma'am; I'll tell you what I know. But if you tell them, ma'am, it will be awful bad for me, my lady."

She looked again, very much frightened, in her face, and was silent.

"No one shall ever know but I. Trust me entirely, and I'll never forget it to you."

"Well, ma'am, there is two men."

"Who are they?"

"Two men, please 'm. I knows one on 'em—he was keeper on the 'Guy o' Warwick,' please, my lady, when there was a hexecution in the 'ouse. They're both sheriff's men."

"And what are they doing here?"

"A hexecution, my lady."

"That is, to sell the furniture and everything for a debt, isn't that it?" inquired the lady, bewildered.

"Well, that was it below at the 'Guy o' Warwick,' miss; but Mr. Vargers, he was courting me down there at the 'Guy o' Warwick,' and offered marriage if I would 'av 'ad him, and he tells me heverything, and he says that there's a paper to take you, please, my lady."

"Take *me*?"

"Yes, my lady; he read it to me in the room by the hall-door. Halice Harden, spinster, and something about the old guv'nor's will, please; and his horder is to take you, please, miss, if you should offer to go out of the door; and there's two on 'em, and they watches turn about, so you can't leave the 'ouse, please, my lady; and if you try they'll only lock you up a prisoner in one room a-top o' the 'ouse; and, for your life, my lady, don't tell no one I said a word."

"Oh! Phœbe. What can they mean? What's to become of me? Somehow or other you must get me out of this house. Help me, for God's sake! I'll throw myself from the window—I'll kill myself rather than remain in their power."

"Hush! My lady, please, I may think of something yet. But don't you do nothing 'and

hover 'ead. You must have patience. They won't be so sharp, maybe, in a day or two. I'll get you out if I can; and, if I can't, then God's will be done. And I'll make out what I can from Mr. Vargers; and don't you let no one think you likes me, and I'll be sly enough, you may count on me, my lady."

Trembling all over, Alice kissed her.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### MORE NEWS OF PAUL DAVIES.

LOUISA DIAPER did not appear that night, nor next morning. She had been spirited away like the rest. Sir Richard had told her that his sister desired that she should go into town, and stay till next day, under the care of the housekeeper in town, and that he would bring her a list of commissions which she was to do for her mistress preparatory to starting for Yorkshire. I daresay this young lady liked her excursion to town well enough. It was not till the night after that she started for the North.

Alice Arden, for a time, lost heart altogether. It was no wonder she should.

That her only brother should be an accomplice, against her, in a plot so appalling, was enough to overpower her; her horror of Longcluse, the effectual nature of her imprisonment, and the strange and, as she feared, unscrupulous people by whom she had been so artfully surrounded, heightened her terrors to the pitch of distraction.

At times she was almost wild; at others stupefied in despair; at others, again, soothed by the kindly intrepidity of Phœbe, she became more collected. Sometimes she would throw herself on her bed, and sob for an hour in helpless agony; and then, exhausted and overpowered, she would fall for a time into a deep sleep, from which she would start, for several minutes, without the power of collecting her thoughts, and with only the stifled cry, "What is it?—Where am I?" and a terrified look round.

One day, in a calmer mood, as she sat in her room after a long talk with Phœbe, the girl came beside her chair with an oddly made key, with a little strap of white leather to the handle, in her hands.

"Here's a latch-key, miss; maybe you know what it opens?"

"Where did you find it?"

"In the old china vase over the chimney, please 'm."

"Let me see—oh! dear, yes, this opens the door in the wall of the grounds, in that direction," and she pointed. "Poor papa lent it to my drawing-master. He lived somewhere beyond that, and used to let himself in by it when he came to give me my lessons."

"I remember that door well, miss," said Phœbe, looking earnestly on the key—"Mr. Crozier let me out that way, one day. Mr. Longcluse has put strangers, you know, in the gate-house. That's shut against us. I'll tell you what, miss—wait—well, I'll *think*. I'll keep this key safe, anyhow; and—the more the merrier," she added with a sudden alacrity, and lifting her finger, by way of signal, for everything now was done with caution here, she left the room, and passed through the suite to the landing, and quietly took out the door-keys, one by one, and returned with her spoil to Alice's room.

"You thought they might lock us up?" whispered Alice.

The girl nodded. "No harm to have 'em, miss—it won't hurt us." She folded them tightly in a handkerchief, and thrust the parcel as far as her arm could reach between the mattress and the bed. "I'll rip the ticken a bit just now, and stitch them in," whispered the girl.

"Didn't I hear another key clink as you put your hand in?" asked Alice.

The girl smiled, and drew out a large key, and nodded, still smiling as she replaced it.

"What does that open?" whispered Alice eagerly.

"*Nothing*, miss," said the girl gravely—"it's the key of the old back-door lock; but there's a new one there now, and this won't open nothing. But I have a use for it. I'll tell you all in time, miss; and, please, you must keep up your heart, mind."

Sir Richard Arden was not the cold villain you may suppose. He was resolved to make an effort of some kind for the extrication of his sister. He could not bear to open his dreadful

situation to his Uncle David, nor to kill himself, nor to defy the vengeance of Longcluse. He would effect her escape and his own simultaneously. In the meantime he must acquiesce, ostensibly at least, in every step determined on by Longcluse.

It was a bright autumnal day as Sir Richard and Mr. Longcluse took the rail to Southampton. Longcluse had his reasons for taking the young Baronet with him.

It was near the hour, by the time they got there, when David Arden would arrive from his northern point of departure. Longcluse looked animated—smiling; but a stupendous load lay on his heart. A single clumsy phrase in the letter of that detective scoundrel might be enough to direct the formidable suspicions of that energetic old gentleman upon him. The next hour might throw him altogether upon the defensive, and paralyse his schemes.

Alice Arden, you little dream of the man and the route by which, possibly, deliverance is speeding to you.

Near the steps of the large hotel that looks seaward, Longcluse and Sir Richard lounges,

expecting the arrival of David Arden almost momentarily. Up drives a fly, piled with portmanteaus, hat-case, dressing-case, and all the other travelling appurtenances of a comfortable wayfarer. Beside the driver sits a servant. The fly draws up at the door near them.

Mr. Longcluse's seasoned heart throbs once or twice oddly. Out gets Uncle David, looking browned and healthy after his northern excursion. On reaching the top of the steps, he halts, and turns round to look about him. Again Mr. Longcluse feels the same odd sensation.

Uncle David recognises Sir Richard, and smiling greets him. He runs down the steps to meet him. After they have shaken hands, and, a little more coldly, he and Mr. Longcluse, he says—

"You are not looking yourself, Dick; you ought to have run down to the Moors, and got up an appetite. How is Alice?"

"Alice? Oh! Alice is very well, thanks."

"I should like to run up to Mortlake to see her. She has been complaining, eh?"

"No, no—better," says Sir Richard.

"And you forget to tell your uncle what you told me," interposes Mr. Longcluse, "that Miss Arden left Mortlake for Yorkshire yesterday."

"Oh!" said Uncle David, turning to Richard again.

"And the servants went before—two or three days ago," said Sir Richard, looking down for a moment, and hastening, under that clear eye, to speak a little truth.

"Well, I wish she had come with us," said David Arden; "but as she could not be persuaded, I'm glad she is making a little change of air and scene, in any direction. By-the-by, Mr. Longcluse, you had a letter, had not you, from our friend Paul Davies?"

"Yes; he seemed to think he had found a clue—from Paris it was—and I wrote to tell him to spare no expense in pushing his inquiries and to draw upon me."

"Well, I have some news to tell you. His exploring voyage will come to nothing: you did not hear?"

"No."

"Why, the poor fellow's dead. I got a letter

—it reached me, forwarded from my house in town, yesterday, from the person who hires the lodgings—to say he had died of scarlatina, very suddenly, and sending an inventory of the things he left. It is a pity, for he seemed a smart fellow, and sanguine about getting to the bottom of it."

"An awful pity!" exclaimed Longcluse, who felt as if a mountain were lifted from his heart, and the entire firmament had lighted up; "an awful pity! Are you quite sure?"

"There can't be a doubt, I'm sorry to say. Then, as Alice has taken wing, I'll pursue my first plan, and cross by the next mail."

"For Paris?" inquired Mr. Longcluse carelessly.

"Yes, sir, for Paris," answered Uncle David deliberately, looking at him; "yes, for Paris."

And then followed a little chat on indifferent subjects. Then Uncle David mentioned that he had an appointment, and must dine with the dull but honest fellow who had asked him to meet him here on a matter of business, which would have done just as well next year, but he

wished it now. Uncle David nodded, and waved his hand, as on entering the door he gave them a farewell smile over his shoulder.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE CATACOMBS.

AT his disappearance, for Sir Richard, the air darkened as when, in the tropics, the sun sets without a twilight, and the silence of an awful night descended.

It seemed that safety had been so near. He had laid his hand upon it, and had let it glide ungrasped between his fingers; and now the sky was black above him, and an unfathomable sea beneath.

Mr. Longcluse was in great spirits. He had grown for a time like the Walter Longcluse of a year before.

They two dined together, and after dinner Mr. Longcluse grew happy, and as he sat with his glass by him he sang, looking over the

waves, a sweet little sentimental song, about ships that pass at sea, and smiles and tears, and "true, boys, true," and "heaven shows a glimpse of its blue." And he walks with Sir Richard to the station, and he says, low, as he leans and looks into the carriage window, of which young Arden was the only occupant—

"Be true to me now, and we may make it up yet."

And so saying, he gives his hand a single pressure as he looks hard in his eyes.

The bell had rung. He was remaining there, he said, for another train. The clapping of the doors had ceased. He stood back. The whistle blew its long piercing yell, and as the train began to glide towards London, the young man saw the white face of Walter Longcluse in deep shadow, as he stood with his back to the lamp, still turned towards him.

The train was now thundering on its course; the solitary lamp glimmered in the roof. He threw himself back, with his foot against the opposite seat.

"Good God! what is one to resolve? All men are cruel when they are exasperated.

Might not good yet be made of Longcluse? What creatures women are!—what fools! How easy all might have been made, with the least temper and reflection! What d——d selfishness!"

Uncle David was now in Paris. The moon was shining over that beautiful city. In a lonely street, in a quarter which fashion had long forsaken—over whose pavement, as yet unconscious of the Revolution, had passed, in the glare of torchlight, the carved and emblazoned carriages of an aristocracy, as shadowy now as the courts of the Cæsars—his footsteps are echoing.

A huge house presents its front. He stops and examines it carefully for a few seconds. It is the house of which he is in search.

At one time the Baron Vanboeren had received patients from the country, to reside in this house. For the last year, during which he had been gathering together his wealth, and detaching himself from business, he had discontinued this, and had gradually got rid of his establishment.

When David Arden rang the bell at the hall-

door, which he had to do repeatedly, it was answered at last by an old woman, high-shouldered, skin and bone, with a great nose and big jaw-bones, and a high-cauled cap. This lean creature looks at him with a vexed and hollow eye. Her bony arm rests on the lock of the hall-door, and she blocks the narrow aperture between its edge and the massive door-case. She inquires in very nasal French what monsieur desires.

"I wish to see monsieur the Baron, if he will permit me an interview," answered Mr. Arden in very fair French.

"Monsieur the Baron is not visible; but if monsieur will, notwithstanding, leave any message he pleases for monsieur the Baron, I will take care he receives it punctually."

"But monsieur the Baron appointed me to call to-night at ten o'clock."

"Is monsieur sure of that?"

"Perfectly."

"Eh, very well; but, if he pleases, I must first learn monsieur's name."

"My name is Arden."

"I believe monsieur is right." She took a

bit of notepaper from her capacious pocket, and peering at it, spelled aloud, "D-a-v-i-d——"

"A-r-d-e-n," interrupted and continued the visitor, spelling his name, with a smile.

"A-r-d-e-n," she followed, reading slowly from her paper; "yes, monsieur is right. You see, this paper says, 'Admit Monsieur David Arden to an interview.' Enter, if you please, monsieur, and follow me."

It was a decayed house of superb proportions, but of a fashion long passed away. The gaunt old woman, with a bunch of large keys clinking at her side, stalked up the broad stairs and into a gallery, and through several rooms opening *en suite.* The rooms were hung with cobwebs, dusty, empty, and the shutters closed, except here and there where the moonlight gleamed through chinks and seams.

David Arden, before he had seen the Baron Vanboeren in London, had pictured him in imagination a tall old man with classic features, and manners courteous and somewhat stately.

We do not fabricate such images; they rise like exhalations from a few scattered data, and present themselves spontaneously. It is this

self-creation that invests them with so much reality in our imaginations, and subjects us to so odd a surprise when the original turns out quite unlike the portrait with which we have been amusing ourselves.

She now pushed open a door, and said, "Monsieur the Baron, here is arrived Monsieur David d'Ardennes."

The room in which he now stood was spacious, but very nearly dark. The shutters were closed outside, and the moonlight that entered came through the circular hole cut in each. A large candle on a bracket burned at the further end of the room. There the Baron stood. A reflector, which interposed between the candle and the door at which David Arden entered, directed its light strongly upon something which the Baron held, and laid upon the table, in his hand; and now that he turned toward his visitor, it was concentrated upon his large face, revealing, with the force of a Rembrandt, all its furrows and finer wrinkles. He stood out against a background of darkness with remarkable force.

The Baron stood before him—a short man in

and shavings and splinters under his feet. There was a great block with a vice attached. In a portion of the fire-place was built a furnace. There were pincers and other instruments lying about the room, which had more the appearance of an untidy workshop than of a study, and seemed a suitable enough abode for the uncouth figure that confronted him.

"Ha! monsieur," growls the Baron, "stone walls have ears, you say if only they had tongues; what tales *these* could tell! This house was one of Madame du Barry's, and was sacked in the great Revolution. The mirrors were let into the plaster in the walls. In some of the rooms there are large fragments still stuck in the wall so fast, you would need a hammer and chisel to dislodge and break them up. This room was an ante-room, and admitted to the lady's bedroom by two doors, this and that. The panels of that other, by which you entered from the stair, were of mirror. They were quite smashed. The furniture, I suppose, flew out of the window; everything was broken up in small bits, and torn to rags, or carried off to the broker after the first fury, and *sansculotte*

families came in and took possession of the wrecked apartments. You will say then, what was left? The bricks, the stones, hardly the plaster on the walls. Yet, Monsieur Arden, I have discovered some of the best treasures the house contained, and they are at present in this room. Are you a collector, Monsieur Arden?"

Uncle David disclaimed the honourable imputation. He was thinking of cutting all this short, and bringing the Baron to the point. The old man was at the period when the egotism of age asserts itself, and was garrulous, and being, perhaps, despotic and fierce (he looked both), he might easily take fire and become impracticable. Therefore, on second thoughts, he was cautious.

"You can now see more plainly," said the Baron. "Will you approach? Concealed by a double covering of strong paper pasted over it, and painted and gilded, each of these two doors on its six panels contains six distinct masterpieces of Watteau's. I have known that for ten years, and have postponed removing them. Twelve Watteaus, as fine as any in the world! I would not trust their removal to any other

hand, and so, the panel comes out without a shake. Come here, monsieur, if you please. This candle affords a light sufficient to see, at least, some of the beauties of these incomparable works."

"Thanks, Baron, a glance will suffice, for I am nothing of an artist."

He approached. It was true that his sight had grown accustomed to the obscurity, for he could now see the Baron's features much more distinctly. His large waxen face was shorn smooth, except on the upper lip, where a short moustache still bristled; short black eyebrows contrasted also with the bald massive forehead, and round the eyes was a complication of mean and cunning wrinkles. Some peculiar lines between these contracted brows gave a character of ferocity to this forbidding and sensual face.

"Now! See there! Those four pictures—I would not sell those four Watteaus for one hundred thousand francs. And the other door is worth the same. Ha!"

"You are lucky, Baron."

"I think so. I do not wish to part with

them; I don't think of selling them. See the folds of that brocade! See the ease and grace of the lady in the sacque, who sits on the bank there, under the myrtles, with the guitar on her lap! and see the animation and elegance of that dancing boy with the tambourine! This is a *chef-d'œuvre.* I ought not to part with that, on any terms—no, never! You, no doubt, know many collectors, wealthy men, in England. Look at that shot silk, green and purple; and whom do you take that to be a portrait of, that lady with the castanets?"

He was pointing out each object, on which he descanted, with his stumpy finger, his hands being, I am bound to admit, by no means clean.

"If you do happen to know such people, nevertheless, I should not object to your telling them where this treasure may be seen, I've no objection. I should not like to part with them, that is true. No, no, *no;* but every man may be tempted, it is possible—possible, just possible."

"I shall certainly mention them to some friends."

"Wealthy men, of course," said the Baron.

"It is an expensive taste, Baron, and none but wealthy people can indulge it."

"True, and these would be *very* expensive. They are unique; that lady there is the *Du Barry*—a portrait worth, alone, six thousand francs. Ha! hé! Yes, when I take zese out and place zem, as I mean before I go, to be seen, they will bring all Europe together. *Mit speck fangt man mause*—with bacon one catches mice!"

"No doubt they will excite attention, Baron. But I feel that I am wasting your time and abusing your courtesy in permitting my visit, the immediate object of which was to earnestly beg from you some information which, I think, no one else can give me."

"Information? Oh! ha! Pray resume your chair, sir. Information? yes, it is quite possible I may have information such as you need, Heaven knows! But knowledge, they say, is power, and if I do you a service I expect as much from you. *Eine hand wascht die and're*—one hand, monsieur, washes ze ozer. No man parts wis zat which is valuable, to strangers, wisout a proper honorarium. I receive no more

patients here; but you understand, I may be induced to attend a patient: I may be *tempted*, you understand."

"But this is not a case of attending a patient, Baron," said David Arden, a little haughtily.

"And what ze devil *is* it, then?" said the Baron, turning on him suddenly. "Monsieur will pardon me, but we professional men must turn our time and knowledge to account, do you see? And we don't give eizer wizout being paid, and *well* paid for them, eh?"

"Of course. I meant nothing else," said David Arden.

"Then, sir, we understand one another so far, and that saves time. Now, what information can the Baron Vanboeren give to Monsieur David Arden?"

"I think you would prefer my putting my questions quite straight."

"Straight as a sword-thrust, sir."

"Then, Baron, I want to know whether you were acquainted with two persons, Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse."

"Yes, I knew zem bos, slightly and yet intimately—intimately and yet but slightly. You

wish, perhaps, to learn particulars about those gentlemen?"

"I do."

"Go on: interrogate."

"Do you perfectly recollect the features of these persons?"

"I ought."

"Can you give me an accurate description of Yelland Mace?"

"I can bring you face to face with both."

"By Jove! sir, are you serious?"

"Mr. Longcluse is in London."

"But you talk of bringing me face to face with them; how soon?"

"In five minutes."

"Oh, you mean a photograph, or a picture?"

"No, in the solid. Here is the key of the catacombs." And he took a key that hung from a nail on the wall.

"Bah, ha, yah!" exploded the Baron, in a ferocious sneer, rather than a laugh, and shrugging his great shoulders to his ears, he shook them in barbarous glee, crying—"What clever fellow you are, Monsieur Arden! you see so well srough ze millstone! *Ich bin klug und weise*—

you sing zat song. I am intelligent and wise, eh, hé! gra-a, ha, ha!"

He seized the candlestick in one hand, and shaking the key in the other by the side of his huge forehead, he nodded once or twice to David Arden.

"Not much life where we are going; but you shall see zem bose."

"You speak riddles, Baron; but by all means bring me, as you say, face to face with them."

"Very good, monsieur; you'll follow me," said the Baron. And he opened a door that admitted to the gallery, and, with the candle and the keys, he led the way, by this corridor, to an iron door that had a singular appearance, being sunk two feet back in a deep wooden frame, that threw it into shadow. This he unlocked, and with an exertion of his weight and strength, swung slowly open.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### RESURRECTIONS.

DAVID ARDEN entered this door, and found himself under a vaulted roof of brick. These were the chambers, for there were at least two, which the Baron termed his catacombs. Along both walls of the narrow apartment were iron doors, in deep recesses, that looked like the huge ovens of an ogre, sunk deep in the wall, and the Baron looked himself not an unworthy proprietor. The Baron had the General's faculty of remembering faces and names.

"Monsieur Yelland Mace? Yes, I will show you him; he is among ze dead."

"Dead?"

"Ay, zis right side is *dead*—all zese."

"Do you mean," says David Arden, "*literally* that Yelland Mace is no longer living?"

"A, B, C, D, E, F, G," mutters the Baron, slowly pointing his finger along the right wall.

"I beg your pardon, Baron, but I don't think you heard me," said David Arden.

"*Perfectly*, excuse me: H, I, J, K, L, M—M. I will show you *now*, if you desire it, Yelland Mace; you shall see him now, and never behold him more. Do you wish very much?"

"Intensely—*most* intensely!" said Uncle David earnestly.

The Baron turned full upon him, and leaned his shoulders against the iron door of the recess. He had taken from his pocket a bunch of heavy keys, which he dangled from his clenched fingers, and they made a faint jingle in the silence that followed, for a few seconds.

"Permit me to ask," said the Baron, "are your inquiries directed to a legal object?"

"I have no difficulty in saying yes," answered he; "a legal object, strictly."

"A legal object, by which you gain considerably?" he asked slowly.

"By which I gain the satisfaction of seeing justice done upon a villain."

"That is fine, monsieur. Eternal justice! I

have thought and said that very often: *Vive la justice eternelle!* especially when her sword shears off the head of my enemy, and her scale is laden with napoleons for my purse."

"Monsieur le Baron mistakes, in my case; I have absolutely nothing to gain by the procedure I propose; it is strictly criminal," said David Arden drily.

"Not an estate? not a slice of an estate? Come, come! *Thorheit!* That is foolish talk."

"I have told you already, nothing," repeated David Arden.

"Then you don't care, in truth, a single napoleon, whether you win or lose. We have been wasting our time, sir. I have no time to bestow for nothing; my minutes count by the crown, while I remain in Paris. I shall soon depart, and practise no more; and my time will become my own—still my own, by no means *yours*. I am candid, sir, and I think you cannot misunderstand me; I must be paid for my time and opportunities."

"I never meant anything else," said Mr. Arden sturdily; "I shall pay you liberally for any service you render me."

"That, sir, is equally frank; we understand now the principle on which I assist you. You wish to see Yelland Mace, so you shall."

He turned about, and struck the key sharply on the iron door.

"There he waits," said the Baron, "and—did you ever see him?"

"No."

"Bah! what a wise man. Then I may show you whom I please, and you know nothing. Have you heard him described?"

"Accurately."

"Well, there is some little sense in it, after all. You shall see."

He unlocked the safe, opened the door, and displayed shelves, laden with rudely-made deal boxes, each of a little more than a foot square. On these were marks and characters in red, some, and some in black, and others in blue.

"Hé! you see," said the Baron, pointing with his key, "my mummies are cased in hieroglyphics. Come! *Here* is the number, the date, and the man."

And lifting them carefully one off the other, he took out a deal box that had stood in the

lowest stratum. The cover was loose, except for a string tied about it. He laid it upon the floor, and took out a plaster mask, and brushing and blowing off the saw-dust, held it up.

David Arden saw a face with large eyes closed, a very high and thin nose, a good forehead, a delicately chiselled mouth; the upper lip, though well formed after the Greek model, projected a little, and gave to the chin the effect of receding in proportion. This slight defect showed itself in profile; but the face, looked at full front, was on the whole handsome, and in some degree even interesting.

"You are quite sure of the identity of this?" asked Uncle David earnestly.

There was a square bit of parchment, with two or three short lines, in a character which he did not know, glued to the concave reverse of the mask. The Baron took it, and holding the light near, read, "Yelland Mace, suspect for his politics, May 2nd, 1844."

"Yes," said Mr. Arden, having renewed his examination, "it very exactly tallies with the description; the nose aquiline, but very delicately formed. Is that writing in cypher?"

"Yes, in cypher."

"And in what language?"

"German."

David Arden looked at it.

"You will make nothing of it. In these inscriptions, I have employed eight languages—five European, and three Asiatic—I am, you see, something of a linguist—and four distinct cyphers; so having that skill, I gave the benefit of it to my *friends;* this being secret."

"Secret?—oh!" said Uncle David.

"Yes, secret; and you will please to say nothing of it to any living creature until the twenty-first of October next, when I retire. You understand commerce, Mr. Arden. My practice is confidential, and I should lose perhaps eighty thousand francs in the short space that intervenes, if I were thought to have played a patient such a trick. It is but twenty days of reserve, and then I go and laugh at them, every one. Piff, puff, paff! ha! ha!"

"Yes, I promise that also," said Uncle David dryly, and to himself he thought, "What a consummate old scoundrel!"

"Very good, sir; we shall want this of Yelland

Mace again, just now; his face and coffin, ha! ha! can rest there for the present." He had replaced the mask in its box, and that lay on the floor. The door of the iron press he shut and locked. "Next, I will show you Mr. Longcluse: those are dead."

He waved his short hand toward the row of iron doors which he had just visited.

"Please, sir, walk with me into this room. Ay, so. Here are the *resurrections*. Will you be good enough—L, Longcluse, M, one, two, three, four; *three*, yes—to hold this candlestick for a moment?"

The Baron unlocked this door, and, after some rummaging, he took forth a box similar to that he had taken out before.

"Yes, right, Walter Longcluse. I tell you how you will see it best: there is brilliant moonlight, stand there."

Through a circular hole in the wall there streamed a beam of moonlight, that fell upon the plaster-wall opposite with the distinctness of the circle of a magic-lantern.

"You see it—you know it! Ha! ha! His pretty face!"

He held the mask up in the moonlight, and the lineaments, sinister enough, of Mr. Longcluse stood, sharply defined in every line and feature, in intense white and black, against the vacant shadow behind. There was the flat nose, the projecting underjaw, the oblique, sarcastic eyebrow, even the line of the slight but long scar, that ran nearly from his eye to his nostril. The same, but younger.

"There is no doubt about *that*. But when was it taken? Will you read what is written upon it?"

Uncle David had taken out the candle, and he held it beside the mask. The Baron turned it round, and read, "Walter Longcluse, 15th October, 1844."

"The same year in which Mace's was taken?"

"So it is, 1844."

"But there is a great deal more than you have read, written upon the parchment in this one."

"It looks more."

"And *is* more. Why, count the words, one, two, four, six, eight. There must be thirty, or upwards."

"Well, suppose there are, sir: I have read, nevertheless, all I mean to read, for the present. Suppose we bring these masks together. We can talk a little then, and I will perhaps tell you more, and disclose to you some secrets of nature and art, of which perhaps you suspect nothing. Come, come, monsieur! kindly take the candle."

The Baron shut the iron door with a clang, and locked it, and, taking up the box, marched into the next room, and placing the boxes one on top of the other, carried them in silence out upon the gallery, accompanied by David Arden.

How desolate seemed the silence of the vast house, in all which, by this time, perhaps there did not burn another light!

They now re-entered the large and strangely-littered chamber in which he had talked with the Baron; they stop among the chips and sawdust with which his work has strewn the floor.

"Set the candle on this table," says he. "I'll light another for a time. See all the trouble and time you cost me!"

He placed the two boxes on the table.

"I am extremely sorry——"

"Not on my account, you needn't. You'll pay me well for it."

"So I will, Baron."

"Sit you down on that, monsieur."

He placed a clumsy old chair, with a balloon-back, for his visitor, and, seating himself upon another, he struck his hand on the table, and said, arresting for a moment the restless movement of his eyes, and fixing on him a savage stare—

"You shall see wonders and hear marvels, if only you are willing to pay what they are worth." The Baron laughed when he had said this.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### ANOTHER.

"YOU shall sit here, Mr. Arden," said the Baron, placing a chair for him. "You shall be comfortable. I grow in confidence with you. I feel inwardly an intuition when I speak wis a man of honour; my demon, as it were, whispers 'Trust him, honour him, make much of him.' Will you take a pipe, or a mug of beer?"

This abrupt invitation Mr. Arden civilly declined.

"Well, I shall have my pipe and beer. See, there is ze barrel—not far to go." He raised the candle, and David Arden saw for the first time the outline of a veritable beer-barrel in the

corner, on tressels, such as might have regaled a party of boors in the clear shadow of a Teniers.

"There is the comely beer-cask, not often seen in Paris, in the corner of our boudoir, resting against the only remaining rags of the sky-blue and gold silk—it is rotten now—with which the room was hung, and a gilded cornice—it is black now—over its head; and now, instead of beautiful women and graceful youths, in gold lace and cut velvets and perfumed powder, there are but one rheumatic and crooked old woman, and one old Prussian doctor, in his shirt-sleeves, ha! ha! *mutat terra vices!* Come, we shall look at these again, and you shall hear more."

He placed the two masks upon the chimney-piece, leaning against the wall.

"And we will illuminate them," says he; and he takes, one after the other, half a dozen pieces of wax candle, and, dripping the melting wax on the chimney-piece, he sticks each candle in turn in a little pool of its own wax.

"I spare nothing, you see, to make all plain. Those two faces present a marked contrast. Do

you, Mr. Arden, know anything, ever so little, of the fate of Yelland Mace?"

"Nothing. Is he living?"

"Suppose he is dead, what then?"

"In that case, of course, I take my leave of the inquiry, and of you, asking you simply one question, whether there was any correspodence between Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse?"

"A very intimate correspondence," said the Baron.

"Of what nature?"

"Ha! They have been combined in business, in pleasures, in crimes," said the Baron. "Look at them. Can you believe it? So dissimilar! They are opposites in form and character, as if fashioned in expression and in feature each to contradict the other; yet so united!"

"And in crime, you say?"

"Ay, in crime—in all things."

"Is Yelland Mace still living?" urged David Arden.

"Those features, in life, you will never behold, sir."

"He is dead. You said that you took that mask from among the dead. *Is* he dead?"

"No, sir; not actually dead, but under a strange condition. Bah! Don't you see I have a secret? Do you prize very highly learning where he is?"

"Very highly, provided he may be secured and brought to trial; and you, Baron, must arrange to give your testimony to prove his identity."

"Yes; that would be indispensable," said the Baron, whose eyes were sweeping the room from corner to corner, fiercely and swiftly. "Without me you can never lift the veil; without me you can never unearth your stiff and pale Yelland Mace, nor without me identify and hang him."

"I rely upon your aid, Baron," said Mr. Arden, who was becoming agitated. "Your trouble shall be recompensed; you may depend upon my honour."

"I am running a certain risk. I am not a fool, though, like little Lebas. I am not to be made away with like a kitten; and once I move in this matter, I burn my ships behind me, and return to my splendid practice, under no circumstances, ever again."

The Baron's pallid face looked more bloodless, his accent was fiercer, and his countenance more ruffianly as he uttered all this.

"I understood, Baron, that you had quite made up your mind to retire within a very few weeks," said David Arden.

"Does any man who has lived as long as you or I quite trust his own resolution? No one likes to be nailed to a plan of action an hour before he need be. I find my practice more lucrative every day. I may be tempted to postpone my retirement, and for a while longer to continue to gather the golden harvest that ripens round me. But once I take this step, all is up with that. You see—you understand. Bah! you are no fool; it is plain, all I sacrifice."

"Of course, Baron, you shall take no trouble, and make no sacrifice, without ample compensation. But are you aware of the nature of the crime committed by that man?"

"I never trouble my head about details; it is enough, the man is a political refugee, and his object concealment."

"But he was no political refugee; he had

nothing to do with politics—he was simply a murderer and a robber."

"What a little rogue! Will you excuse my smoking a pipe and drinking a little beer? Now, he never hinted that, although I knew him very intimately, for he was my patient for some months; never hinted it, he was so sly."

"And Mr. Longcluse, was *he* your patient also?"

"Ha! to be sure he was. You won't drink some beer? No; well, in a moment."

He drew a little jugful from the cask, and placed it, and a pewter goblet, on the table, and then filled, lighted, and smoked his pipe as he proceeded.

"I will tell you something concerning those gentlemen, Mr. Longcluse and Mr. Mace, which may amuse you. Listen."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### BROKEN.

"MY hands were very full," said the Baron, displaying his stumpy fingers. "I received patients in this house; I had what you call many irons in ze fire. I was making napoleons then, I don't mind telling you, as fast as a man could run bullets. My minutes counted by the crown. It was in the month of May, 1844, late at night, a man called here, wanting to consult me. He called himself Herr von Konigsmark. I went down and saw him in my audience room. He knew I was to be depended upon. Such people tell one another who may be trusted. He told me he was an Austrian proscribed: very good. He proposed to place

himself in my hands: very well. I looked him in the face—you have *there* exactly what I saw."

He extended his hand toward the mask of Yelland Mace.

"'You are an Austrian,' I said, 'a native subject of the empire?'

"'Yes.'

"'Italian?'

"'No.'

"'Hungarian?'

"'No.'

"'Well, you are not *German*—ha, ha!—I can swear to that.'

"He was speaking to me in German.

"'Your accent is foreign. Come, confidence. You must be no impostor. I must make no mistake, and blunder into a national type of features, all wrong; if I make your mask, it must do us credit. I know many gentlemen's secrets, and as many ladies' secrets. A man of honour! What are you afraid of?'"

"You were not a statuary?" said Uncle David, astonished at his versatility.

"Oh, yes! A statuary, but only in grotesque,

you understand. I will show you some of my work by-and-by."

"And I shall perhaps understand."

"You *shall, perfectly.* With some reluctance, then, he admitted that what I positively asserted was true; for I told him I knew from his accent he was an Englishman. Then, with some little pressure, I invited him to tell his name. He did—it was Yelland Mace. *That* is Yelland Mace."

He had now finished his pipe: he went over to the chimney-piece, and having knocked out the ashes, and with his pipe pointing to the tip of the long thin plaster nose, he said, "Look well at him. Look till you know all his features by rote. Look till you fix them for the rest of your days well in memory, and then say what in the devil's name you could make of them. Look at that high nose, as thin as a fish-knife. Look at the line of the mouth and chin; see the mild gentleman-like contour. If you find a fellow with a flat nose, and a pair of upper tusks sticking out an inch, and a squint that turns out one eye like the white of an egg, you pull out the tusks, you raise the skin of the nose, slice a

bit out of the cheek, and make a false bridge, as high as you please; heal the cheek with a stitch or two, and operate with the lancet for the squint, and your bust is complete. Bravo! you understand?"

"I confess, Baron, I do not."

"You shall, however. Here is the case—a political refugee, like Monsieur Yelland Mace——"

"But he was no such thing."

"Well, a criminal—any man in such a situation is, for me, a political refugee zat, for reasons, desires to revisit his country, and yet must be so thoroughly disguised zat by no surprise, and by no process, can he be satisfactorily recognised; he comes to me, tells me his case, and says, 'I desire, Baron, to become your patient,' and so he places himself in my hands, and so —ha, ha! You begin to perceive?"

"Yes, I do! I think I understand you clearly. But, Lord bless me! what a nefarious trade!" exclaimed Uncle David.

The Baron was not offended; he laughed.

"Nevertheless," said he, "there's no harm in that. Not that I care much about the question

of right or wrong in the matter; but there's none. Bah! who's the worse of his going back? or, if he did not, who's the better?"

Uncle David did not care to discuss this point in ethics, but simply said—

"And Mr. Longcluse was also a patient of yours?"

"Yes, certainly," said the Baron.

"We Londoners know nothing of his history," said Mr. Arden.

"A political refugee, like Mr. Mace," said the Baron. "Now, look at Herr Yelland Mace. It was a severe operation, but a beautiful one! I opened the skin with a single straight cut from under the lachrymal gland to the nostril, and one underneath meeting it, you see" (he was tracing the line of the scalpel with the stem of his pipe), "along the base of the nose from the point. Then I drew back the skin over the bridge, and then I operated on the bone and cartilage, cutting them and the muscle at the extremity down to a level with the line of the face, and drew the flap of skin back, cutting it to meet the line of the skin of the cheek; *there*, you see, so much for the nose. Now see the

curved eyebrow. Instead of that very well marked arch, I resolved it should slant from the radix of the nose in a straight line obliquely upward; to effect which I removed at the upper edge of each eyebrow, at the corner next the temple, a portion of the skin and muscle, which, being reunited and healed, produced the requisite contraction, and thus drew that end of each brow upward. And now, having disposed of the nose and brows, I come to the mouth. Look at the profile of this mask."

He was holding that of Yelland Mace toward Mr. Arden, and with the bowl of the pipe in his right hand pointed out the lines and features on which he descanted, with the amber point of the stem.

"Now, if you observe, the chin in this face, by reason of the marked prominence of the nose, has the effect of receding, but it does not. If you continue the perpendicular line of ze forehead, ze chin, you see, meets it. The upper lip, though short and well-formed, projects a good deal. Ze under lip rather retires, and this adds to the receding effect of the chin, you see. My *coup-d'œil* assured me that it was

practicable to give to this feature the character of a projecting under-jaw. The complete depression of the nose more than half accomplished it. The rest is done by cutting away two upper and four under-teeth, and substituting false ones at the desired angle. By that application of dentistry I obtained zis new line." (He indicated the altered outline of the features, as before, with his pipe.). "It was a very pretty operation. The effect you could hardly believe. He was two months recovering, confined to his bed, ha! ha! We can't have an immovable mask of living flesh, blood, and bone for nothing. He was threatened with erysipelas, and there was a rather critical inflammation of the left eye. When he could sit up, and bear the light, and looked in the glass, instead of thanking me, he screamed like a girl, and cried and cursed for an hour, ha, ha, ha! He was glad of it afterward: it was so complete. "Look at it" (he held up the mask of Yelland Mace): "a face on the whole good-looking, but a little of a parrot-face, you know. I took him into my hands with that face, and" (taking up the mask of Mr. Longcluse and

turning it with a slow oscillation, so as to present it in every aspect), he added, "these are the features of Yelland Mace as I sent him into the world with the name of Herr Longcluse!"

"You mean to say that Yelland Mace and Walter Longcluse are the same person?" cried David Arden, starting to his feet.

"I swear that here is Yelland Mace *before*, and here *after* the operation, call him what you please. When I was in London, two months ago, I saw Monsieur Longcluse. *He* is Yelland Mace; and these two masks are both masks of the same Yelland Mace."

"Then the evidence is complete," said David Arden, with awe in his face, as he stood for a moment gazing on the masks which the Baron Vanboeren held up side by side before him.

"Ay, the masks and the witness to explain them," said the Baron sturdily.

"It is a perfect identification," murmured Mr. Arden, with his eyes still riveted on the plaster faces. "Good God! how wonderful that proof, so complete in all its parts, should remain!"

"Well, I don't love Longcluse, since so he is

named; he disobliged me when I was in London," said the Baron. "Let him hang, since so you ordain it. I'm ready to go to London, give my evidence, and produce these plaster casts. But my time and trouble must be considered."

"Certainly."

"Yes," said the Baron; "and to avoid tedious arithmetic, and for the sake of convenience, I will agree to visit London, at what time you appoint, to bring with me these two masks, and to give my evidence against Yelland Mace, otherwise Walter Longcluse, my stay in London not to exceed a fortnight, for ten thousand pounds sterling."

"I don't think, Baron, you can be serious," said Mr. Arden, as soon as he had recovered breath.

"Donner-wetter! I will show you that I am!" bawled the Baron. "Now or never, sir. Do as you please. I shan't abate a franc. Do you like my offer?"

On the event of this bargain are depending issues of which David Arden knows nothing; the dangers, the agonies, the salvation of those

who are nearest to him on earth. The villain Longcluse, and the whole fabric of his machinations, may be dashed in pieces by a word.

How, then, did David Arden, who hated a swindle, answer the old extortioner, who asked him "Do you like my offer?"

"Certainly not, sir," said David Arden, sternly.

"Then *was* scheert's mich! What do I care! No more, no more about it!" yelled the Baron in a fury, and dashed the two masks to pieces on the hearth-stone at his feet, and stamped the fragments into dust with his clumsy shoes.

With a cry, old Uncle David rushed forward to arrest the demolition, but too late. The Baron, who was liable to such accesses of rage, was grinding his teeth, and rolling his eyes, and stamping in fury.

The masks, those priceless records, were gone, past all hope of restoration. Uncle David felt for a moment so transported with anger, that I think he was on the point of striking him. How it would have fared with him if he had, I can't tell."

"Now!" howled the Baron, "ten times ten thousand pounds would not place you where

you were, sir. You fancied, perhaps, I would stand haggling with you all night, and yield at last to your obstinacy. What is my answer? The floor strewn with the fragments of your calculation. Where will you turn—what will you do now?"

"Suppose I do this," said Uncle David fiercely —"report to the police what I have seen—your masks and all the rest, and accomplish, besides, all I require, by my own evidence as to what I myself saw?"

"And I will confront you, as a witness," said the Baron, with a cold sneer, "and deny it all —swear it is a dream, and aid your poor relatives in proving you unfit to manage your own money matters."

Uncle David paused for a moment. The Baron had no idea how near he was at that moment to a trial of strength with his English visitor. Uncle David thinks better of it, and he contents himself with saying, "I shall have advice, and you shall *most certainly* hear from me again."

Forth from the room strides David Arden in high wrath. Fearing to lose his way, he bawls

over the banister, and through the corridors, "Is any one there?" and after a time the old woman, who is awaiting him in the hall, replies, and he is once more in the open street.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### DOPPELGANGER.

IT was late, he did not know or care how late. He was by no means familiar with this quarter of the city. He was agitated and angry, and did not wish to return to his hotel till he had a little walked off his excitement. Slowly he sauntered along, from street to street. These were old-fashioned, such as were in vogue in the days of the Regency. Tall houses with gables facing the street; few of them showing any light from their windows, and their dark outlines discernible on high against the midnight sky. Now he heard the voices of people near, emerging from a low theatre in a street at the right. A number of men come along the trottoir, toward Uncle David. They were going

to a gaming-house and restaurant at the end of the street, which he had nearly reached. This troop of idlers he accompanies. They turn into an open door, and enter a passage not very brilliantly lighted. At the left was the open door of a restaurant. The greater number of those who enter follow the passage, however, which leads to the roulette-room.

As Uncle David, with a caprice of curiosity, follows slowly in the wake of this accession to the company, a figure passes and goes before him into the room.

With a strange thrill he takes or mistakes this figure for Mr. Longcluse. He pauses, and sees the tall figure enter the roulette-room. He follows it as soon as he recollects himself a little, and goes into the room. The players are, as usual, engrossed by the game. But at the far side, beyond these busy people, he sees this person, whom he recognises by a light great-coat, stooping with his lips pretty near the ear of a man who was sitting at the table. He raises himself in a moment more, and stands before Uncle David, and at the first glance he is quite certain that Mr. Longcluse is before him. The tall man,

stands with folded arms, and looks carelessly round the room, and at Uncle David among the rest.

"Here," he thought, "is the man; and the evidence, clear and conclusive, and so near this very spot, now scattered in dust and fragments, and the witness who might have clenched the case impracticable!"

This tall man, however, he begins to perceive, has points, and strong ones, of dissimilarity, notwithstanding his general resemblance to Mr. Longcluse. His beard and hair are red; his shoulders are broader, and very round; much clumsier and more powerful he looks; and there is an air of vulgarity and swagger and boisterous good spirits about him, certainly in marked contrast with Mr. Longcluse's very quiet demeanour.

Uncle David now finds himself in that uncomfortable state of oscillation between two opposite convictions which, in a matter of supreme importance, amounts very nearly to torture.

This man does not appear at all put out by Mr. Arden's observant presence, nor even conscious of it. A place becomes vacant at the

table, and he takes it, and stakes some money, and goes on, and wins and loses, and at last yawns and turns away, and walks slowly round to the door near which David Arden is standing. Is not this the very man whom he saw for a moment on board the steamer, as he crossed? As he passes a jet of gas, the light falls upon his face at an angle that brings out lines that seem familiar to the Englishman, and for the moment determines his doubts. David Arden, with his eyes fixed upon him, says, as he was about to pass him—

"How d'ye do, Mr. Longcluse?"

The gentleman stops, smiles, and shrugs.

"Pardon, monsieur," he says in French, "I do not speak English or German."

The quality of the voice that spoke these words was, he thought, different from Mr. Longcluse's—less tone, less depth, and more nasal.

The gentleman pauses and smiles with his head inclined, evidently expecting to be addressed in French.

"I believe I have made a mistake, sir," hesitates Mr. Arden.

The gentleman inclines his head lower, smiles,

and waits patiently for a second or two. Mr. Arden, a little embarrassed, says—

"I thought, monsieur, I had met you before in England."

"I have never been in England, monsieur," says the patient and polite Frenchman, in his own language. "I cannot have had the honour, therefore, of meeting monsieur *there*."

He pauses politely.

"Then I have only to make an apology. I beg your—I beg—but—but surely—I think—by Jove!" he breaks into English, "I can't be mistaken—you *are* Mr. Longcluse."

The tall gentleman looks so unaffectedly puzzled, and so politely good-natured, as he resumes, in the tones which seem perfectly natural, and yet one note in which David Arden fails to recognize, and says—

"Monsieur must not trouble himself of having made a mistake: my name is St. Ange."

"I believe I *have* made a mistake, monsieur—pray excuse me."

The gentleman bows very ceremoniously, and Monsieur St. Ange walks slowly out, and takes a glass of curaçoa in the outer room. As he is

paying the *garçon*, Mr. Arden again appears, once more in a state of uncertainty, and again leaning to the belief that this person is indeed the Mr. Longcluse who at present entirely possesses his imagination.

The tall stranger with the round shoulders in truth resembled the person who, in a midnight interview on Hampstead Heath, had discussed some momentous questions with Paul Davies, as we remember; but that person spoke in the peculiar accent of the northern border. *His* beard, too, was exorbitant in length, and flickered wide and red, in the wind. This beard, on the contrary, was short and trim, and hardly so red, I think, as that moss-trooper's. On the whole, the likeness in both cases was somewhat rude and general. Still the resemblance to Longcluse again struck Mr. Arden so powerfully, that he actually followed him into the street and overtook him only a dozen steps away from the door, on the now silent pavement.

Hearing his hurried step behind him, the object of his pursuit turns about and confronts him for the first time with an offended and haughty look.

"Monsieur!" says he a little grimly, drawing himself up as he comes to a sudden halt.

"The impression has forced itself upon me again that you *are* no other than Mr. Walter Longcluse," says Uncle David.

The tall gentleman recovered his good-humour, and smiled as before, with a shrug.

"I have not the honour of that gentleman's acquaintance, monsieur, and cannot tell, therefore, whether he in the least resembles me. But as this kind of thing is unusual, and grows wearisome, and may end in putting me out of temper—which is not easy, although quite possible—and as my assurance that I am really myself, and not another person, seems insufficient to convince monsieur, I shall be happy to offer other evidence of the most unexceptionable kind. My house is only two streets distant. There my wife and daughter await me, and our curé partakes of our little supper at twelve. I am a little late," says he, listening, for the clocks are tolling twelve; "however, it is a little more than two hundred metres, if you will accept my invitation, and I shall be very happy to introduce you to my wife, to my daughter Clo-

tilde, and to our good curé, who is a most agreeable man. Pray come, share our little supper, see what sort of people we are, and in this way—more agreeable, I hope, than any other, and certainly less fallacious—you can ascertain whether I am Monsieur St. Ange, or that other gentleman with whom you are so obliging as to confound me. Pray come; it is not much—a fricassée, a few cutlets, an omelette, and a glass of wine. Madame St. Ange will be charmed to make your acquaintance, my daughter will sing us a song, and you will say that Monsieur le Curé is really a most entertaining companion."

There was something so simple and thoroughly good-natured in this invitation, under all the circumstances, that Mr. Arden felt a little ashamed of his persistent annoyance of so hospitable a fellow, and for the moment he was convinced that he must have been in error.

"Sir," says David Arden, "I am now convinced that I must have been mistaken; but I cannot deny myself the honour of being presented to Madame St. Ange, and I assure you I am quite

ashamed of the annoyance I must have caused you, and I offer a thousand apologies."

"Not one, pray," replies the Frenchman, with great good-humour and gaiety. "I felicitate myself on a mistake which promises to result so happily."

So side by side, at a leisurely pace, they pursued their way through these silent streets, and unaccountably the conviction again gradually stole over Uncle David that he was actually walking by the side of Mr. Longcluse.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A SHORT PARTING.

THE fluctuations of Mr. Arden's conviction continued. His new acquaintance chatted gaily. They passed a transverse street, and he saw him glance quickly right and left, with a shrewd eye that did not quite accord with his careless demeanour.

Here for a moment the moonlight fell full upon them, and the effect of this new light was, once more, to impair Mr. Arden's confidence in his last conclusions about this person. Again he was at sea as to his identity.

There were the gabble and vociferation of two women quarrelling in the street to the left, and three tipsy fellows, marching home, were singing a trio some way up the street to the right.

They had encountered but one figure—a seedy scrivener, slip-shod, shuffling his way to his garret, with a baize bag of law-papers to copy in his left hand, and a sheaf of quills in his right, and a pale, careworn face turned up towards the sky. The streets were growing more silent and deserted as they proceeded.

He was sauntering onward by the side of this urbane and garrulous stranger, when, like a whisper, the thought came, "Take care!"

David Arden stopped short.

"Eh, bien?" said his polite companion, stopping simultaneously, and staring in his face a little grimly.

"On reflection, monsieur, it is so late, that I fear I should hardly reach my hotel in time if I were to accept your agreeable invitation, and letters probably await me, which I should, at least, *read* to-night."

"Surely monsieur will not disappoint me—surely monsieur is not going to treat me so oddly?" expostulated Monsieur St. Ange.

"Good night, sir. Farewell!" said David Arden, raising his hat as he turned to go.

There intervened not two yards between

them, and the polite Monsieur St. Ange makes a stride after him, and extends his hand—whether there is a weapon in it I know not; but he exclaims fiercely—

"Ha! robber! My purse!"

Fortunately, perhaps, at that moment, from a lane only a few yards away, emerge two gendarmes, and Monsieur St. Ange exclaims, "Ah, monsieur, mille pardons! Here it is! All safe, monsieur. Pray excuse my mistake as frankly as I have excused yours. Adieu!"

Monsieur St. Ange raises his hat, shrugs, smiles, and withdrew.

Uncle David thought, on the whole, he was well rid of his ambiguous acquaintance, and strode along beside the gendarmes, who civilly directed him upon his way, which he had lost.

So, then, upon Mr. Longcluse's fortunes the sun shone; his star, it would seem, was in the ascendant. If the evil genius who ruled his destiny was contending, in a chess game, with the good angel of Alice Arden, her game seemed pretty well lost, and the last move near.

When David Arden reached his hotel a note awaited him, in the hand of the Baron Vanbo-

eren. He read it under the gas in the hall. It said :—

"We must, in this world, forgive and reconsider many things. I therefore pardon you, you me. So soon as you have slept upon our conversation, you will accept an offer which I cannot modify. I always proportion the burden to the back. The rich pay me handsomely ; for the poor I have prescribed and operated, sometimes, for nothing! You have the good fortune, like myself, to be childless, wifeless, and rich. When I take a fancy to a thing, nothing stops me ; you, no doubt, in like manner. The trouble is something to me ; the danger, which you count nothing, to me is *much*. The compensation I name, estimated without the circumstances, is large ; compared with my wealth, trifling ; compared with your wealth, nothing ; as the condition of a transaction between you and me, therefore, not worth mentioning. The accident of last night I can repair. The original matrix of each mask remains safe in my hands : from this I can multiply casts *ad libitum*. Both these matrices I will hammer into powder at twelve o'clock to-morrow night, unless my liberal offer shall have been accepted before that hour. I write to a man of honour. We understand each other.

"EMMANUEL VANBOEREN."

The ruin, then, was not irretrievable ; and there was time to take advice, and think it over. In the Baronet's brutal letter there was a coarse logic, not without its weight.

In better spirits David Arden betook himself

to bed. It vexed him to think of submitting to the avarice of that wicked old extortioner; but to that submission, reluctant as he is, it seems probable he will come.

And now his thoughts turn upon the hospitable Monsieur St. Ange, and he begins, I must admit not altogether without reason, to reflect what a fool he has been. He wonders whether that hospitable and polite gentleman had intended to murder him, at the moment when the gendarmes so luckily appeared. And in the midst of his speculations, overpowered by fatigue, he fell asleep, and ate his breakfast next morning very happily.

Uncle David had none of that small diplomatic genius that helps to make a good attorney. That sort of knowledge of human nature would have prompted a careless reception of the Baron's note, and an entire absence of that promptitude which seems to imply an anxiety to seize an offer.

Accordingly, it was at about eleven o'clock in the morning that he presented himself at the house of the Baron Vanboeren.

He was not destined to conclude a recon-

ciliation with that German noble, nor to listen to his abrupt loquacity, nor ever more to discuss or negotiate anything whatsoever with him, for the Baron Vanboeren had been found that morning close to his hall door on the floor, shot with no less than three bullets through his body, and his pipe in both hands clenched to his blood-soaked breast like a crucifix. The Baron is not actually dead. He has been hours insensible. He cannot live; and the doctor says that neither speech nor recollection can return before he dies.

By whose hands, for what cause, in what manner the world had lost that excellent man, no one could say. A great variety of theories prevail on the subject. He had sent the old servant for Pierre la Roche, whom he employed as a messenger, and he had given him at about a quarter to eleven a note addressed to David Arden, Esquire, which was no doubt that which Mr. Arden had received.

Had Heaven decreed that this investigation should come to naught? This blow seemed irremediable.

David Arden, however, had, as I mentioned,

official friends, and it struck him that he might through them obtain access to the rooms in which his interviews with the Baron had taken place; and that an ingenious and patient artist in plaster might be found who would search out the matrices, or, at worst, piece the fragments of the mask together, and so, in part, perhaps, restore the demolished evidence. It turned out, however, that the destruction of these relics was too complete for any such experiments; and all that now remained was, upon the Baron's letter of the evening before, to move in official quarters for a search for those "matrices" from which it was alleged the masks were taken.

This subject so engrossed his mind, that it was not until after his late dinner that he began once more to think of Monsieur St. Ange, and his resemblance to Mr. Longcluse; and a new suspicion began to envelope those gentlemen in his imagination. A thought struck him, and up got Uncle David, leaving his wine unfinished, and a few minutes more saw him in the telegraph office, writing the following message :—

"From Monsieur David Arden, etc., to Monsieur Blount, 5, Manchester Buildings, Westminster, London.

"Pray telegraph immediately to say whether Mr. Longcluse is at his house, Bolton Street, Piccadilly."

No answer reached him that night; but in the morning he found a telegram dated 11.30 of the previous night, which said—

"Mr. Longcluse is ill at his house at Richmond—better to-day."

To this promptly he replied—

"See him, if possible, immediately at Richmond, and say how he looks. The surrender of the lease in Crown Alley will be an excuse. See him if there. Ascertain with certainty where. Telegraph immediately."

No answer had reached Uncle David at three o'clock P.M.; he had dispatched his message at nine. He was impatient, and walked to the telegraph office to make inquiries, and to grumble. He sent another message in querulous and peremptory laconics. But no answer came till near twelve o'clock, when the following was delivered to him:—

"Yours came while out. Received at 6 P.M. Saw Longcluse at Richmond. Looks seedy. Says he is all right now."

He read this twice or thrice, and lowered the

hand whose fingers held it by the corner, and looked up, taking a turn or two about the room; and he thought what a precious fool he must have appeared to Monsieur St. Ange, and then again, with another view of that gentleman's character, what an escape he had possibly had.

So there was no distraction any longer; and he directed his mind now exclusively upon the distinct object of securing possession of the moulds from which the masks were taken; and for many reasons it is not likely that very much will come of his search.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### AT MORTLAKE.

EVENTS do not stand still at Mortlake. It is now about four o'clock on a fine autumnal afternoon. Since we last saw her, Alice Arden has not once sought to pass the hall-door. It would not have been possible to do so. No one passed that barrier without a scrutiny, and the aid of the key of the man who kept guard at the door, as closely as ever did the officer at the hatch of the debtor's prison. The suite of five rooms upstairs, to which Alice is now strictly confined, is not only comfortable, but luxurious. It had been fitted up for his own use by Sir Reginald years before he exchanged it for those rooms downstairs which, as he grew older, he preferred.

Levi every day visited the house, and took a report of all that was said and planned upstairs, in a tête-à-tête with Phœbe Chiffinch, in the great parlour among the portraits. The girl was true to her young and helpless mistress, and was in her confidence, outwitting the rascally Jew, who every time, by Longcluse's order, bribed her handsomely for the information that was misleading him.

From Phœbe the young lady concealed no pang of her agony. Well was it for her that in their craft they had exchanged the comparatively useless Miss Diaper for this poor girl, on whose apprenticeship to strange ways, and a not very fastidious life, they relied for a clever and unscrupulous instrument. Perhaps she had more than the cunning they reckoned upon. "But I 'av' took a liking to ye, miss, and they'll not make nothing of Phœbe Chiffinch."

Alice was alone in her room, and Phœbe Chiffinch came, running up the great staircase singing, and through the intervening suite of rooms, entered that in which her young mistress awaited her return. Her song falters and dies into a strange ejaculation, as she passes the door.

"The Lord be thanked, that's over and done!" she exclaims, with a face pale from excitement.

"Sit down, Phœbe; you are trembling; you must drink a little water. Are you well?"

"La! quite well, miss," said Phœbe, more cheerily, and then burst into tears. She gulped down some of the water which the frightened young lady held to her lips, and recovering quickly, she gets on her feet, and says impatiently—"I'm sure, miss, I don't know what makes me such a fool; but I'm all right now, ma'am; and you asked me, the other day, about the big key of the old back-door lock that I showed you, and I said, though it could not open no door, I would find a use for it, yet. So I 'av', miss."

"Go on; I recollect perfectly."

"You remember the bit of parchment I asked you to write the words on yesterday evening, miss? They was these: 'Passage on the left, from main passage to housekeeper's room,' &c. Well, I was with Mr. Vargers when he locked that passage up, and it leads to a door in the side of the 'ouse, which it opens into the grounds; and in that houter door he left a key, and only took

with him the key of the door at the other end, which it opens from the 'ousekeeper's passage. So all seemed sure—sure it is, so long as you can't get into that side passage, which it is locked."

"I understand; go on, Phœbe."

"Well, miss, the reason I vallied that key I showed you so much, was because it's as like the key of the side passage as one egg is to another, only it won't turn in the lock. So, as that key I must 'av', I tacked the bit of parchment you wrote to the 'andle of the other, which the two matches exactly, and I didn't tell you, miss, thinking what a taking you'd be in, but I went down to try if I could not change it for the right one."

"It was kind of you not to tell me; go on," said the young lady.

"Well, miss, I 'ad the key in my pocket, ready to change; and I knew well how 'twould be, if I was found out—I'd get the sack, or be locked up 'ere myself, more likely, and no more chances for you. Mr. Vargers was in the room —the porter's room, they calls it now—and in I goes. I did not see no one there, but Vargers

and he was lookin' sly, I thought, and him and Mr. Boult has been talking me over, I fancy, and they don't quite trust me. So I began to talk, wheedling him the best I could to let me go into town for an hour; 'twas only for talk, for well I knew I shouldn't get to go; but nothing but chaff did he answer. And then, says I, is Mr. Levice come yet, and he said, he is, but he has a second key of the back door, and he may 'av' let himself hout. Well, I says, thinking to make Vargers jealous, he's a werry pleasant gentleman, a bit too pleasant for me, and I'm a-going to the kitchen, and I'd raythe he wasn't there, smoking as he often does, and talking nonsense, when I'm in it. There's others that's nicer, to my fancy, than him—so, jest, you go and see, and I'll take care of heverything 'ere till you come back—and don't you be a minute. There was the keys, lying along the chimney-piece, at my left, and the big table, in front, and nothing to hinder me from changing mine for his, but Vargers' eye over me. Little I thought he'd 'av' bin so ready to do as I said. But he smiled to himself-like, and he said, he'd go and see. So away he went; and

I listens at the door till I heard his foot on the tiles of the passage that goes down by the 'ousekeeper's room, and the billiard-room, to the kitchen; and then, on tip-toe, as quick as light, I goes to the chimney-piece, and without a sound, I takes the very key I wanted in my fingers, and drops it into my pocket, but putting down the other in its place, I knocked down the big leaden hink-bottle, and didn't it make a bang on the floor—and a terrible hoarse voice roars out from the tother side of the table—'What the devil are you doing there, huzzy?' Saving your presence, miss; and up gets Mr. Boult, only half awake, looking as mad as Bedlam, and I thought I would have fainted away! Who'd 'av' fancied he was in the room? He had his 'ead on the table, and the cloak over it, and I think, when they 'eard me a-coming downstairs, they agreed he should 'ide hisself so, to catch me, while Vargers would leave the room, to try if I would meddle with the keys, or the like—and while Mr. Boult was foxing, he fell asleep in right earnest. Warn't it a joke, miss? So I brazent it hout, miss, the best I could, and I threatened to complain to Mr.

Levi, and said I'd stay no longer, to be talked to, that way, by sich as he. And Boult could not tell Vargers he was asleep, and so I saw him count over the keys, and up I ran, singing."

By this time the girl was on her knees, concealing the key between the beds, with the others.

"Thank God, Phœbe, you have got it! But, oh! all that is before us still!"

"Yes, there's work enough, miss. I'll not be so frightened no more. Tom Chiffinch, that beat the Finchley Pet, after ninety good rounds, was my brother, and I won't show nothing but pluck, miss, from this out—you'll see."

Alice had proposed writing to summon her friends to her aid. But Phœbe protested against that extremely perilous measure. Her friends were away from London; who could say where? And she believed that the attempt to post the letters would miscarry, and that they were certain to fall into the hands of their jailors. She insisted that Alice should rely on the simple plan of escape from Mortlake.

Martha Tansey, it is true, was anxious. She wondered how it was that she had not once

heard from her young mistress since her journey to Yorkshire. And a passage in a letter which had reached her, from the old servant, at David Arden's town house, who had been mystified by Sir Richard, perplexed and alarmed her further, by inquiring how Miss Alice looked, and whether she had been knocked up by the journey to Arden on Wednesday.

So matters stood.

Each evening Mr. Levi was in attendance, and this day, according to rule, she went down to the grand old dining-room.

"How'sh Miss Chiffinch?" said the little Jew, advancing to meet her; "how'sh her grashe the duchess, in the top o' the houshe? Ish my Lady Mount-garret ash proud ash ever?"

"Well, I do think, Mr. Levice, there's a great change; she's bin growing better the last two days, and she's got a letter last night that's seemed to please her."

"Wha'at letter?"

"The letter you gave me last night for her."

"O-oh! Ah! I wonder—eh? Do you happen to know what wa'azh in that ere letter?" he asked, in an insinuating whisper.

"Not I, Mr. Levice. She don't trust me not as far as you'd throw a bull by the tail. You might 'av' managed that better. You must 'a frightened her some way about me. I try to be agreeable all I can, but she won't a-look at me."

"Well, I don't want to know, *I'm* sure. Did she talk of going out of doors since?"

"No; there's a frost in the hair still, and she says till that's gone she won't stir out."

"That frost will last a bit, I guess. Any more newshe?"

"Nothing."

"Wait a minute 'ere," said Mr. Levi, and he went into the room beyond this, where she knew there were writing materials.

She waited some time, and at length took the liberty of sitting down. She was kept a good while longer. The sun went down; the drowsy crimson that heralds night overspread the sky. She coughed; several fits of coughing she tried at short intervals. Had Mr. Levice, as she called him, forgotten her? He came out at length in the twilight.

"Shtay you 'ere a few minutes more," said

that gentleman, as he walked thoughtfully through the room and paused. "You wazh asking yesterday where izh Sir Richard Harden. Well, hezh took hishelf off to Harden in Yorkshire, and he'll not be 'ome again for a week."

Having delivered this piece of intelligence, he nodded, and slowly went to the hall, and closed the door carefully as he left the room. She followed to the door and listened. There was plainly a little fuss going on in the hall. She heard feet in motion, and low talking. She was curious, and would have peeped, but the door was secured on the outside.

The twilight had deepened, and for the first time she saw that a ray of candle-light came through the keyhole from the inner room. She opened the door softly, and saw a gentleman writing at the table. He was quite alone. He turned, and rose: a tall, slight gentleman, with a singular countenance that startled her.

"You are Phœbe Chiffinch," said a deep, clear voice, sternly, as the gentleman pointed towards her with the plume end of the pen he held in his fingers. "I am Mr. Longcluse. It is I who have

sent you two pounds each day by Levi. I hear you have got it all right."

The girl curtseyed, and said "Yes, sir," at the second effort, for she was startled. He had taken out and opened his pocket-book.

"Here are *ten* pounds," and he handed her a rustling new note by the corner. "I'll treat you liberally, but you must speak truth, and do exactly as you are ordered by Levi." She curtseyed again. There was something in that gentleman that frightened her awfully.

"If you do so, I mean to give you a hundred pounds when this business is over. I have paid you as my servant, and if you deceive me I'll punish you; and there are two or three little things they complain of at the 'Guy of Warwick,' and" (he swore a hard oath) "you shall hear of them if you do."

She curtseyed, and felt, not angry, as she would if anyone else had said it, but frightened, for Mr. Longcluse's was a name of power at Mortlake.

"You gave Miss Arden a letter last night. You know what was in it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"An offer of marriage from you, sir."

"Yes: how do you know that?"

"She told me, please, sir."

"How did she take it? Come, don't be afraid."

"I'd say it pleased her well, sir."

He looked at her in much surprise, and was silent for a time.

He repeated his question, and receiving a similar answer, reflected on it.

"Yes; it *is* the best way out of her troubles; she begins to see that," he said, with a strange smile.

He walked to the chimney-piece, and leaned on it; and forgot the presence of Phœbe. She was too much in awe to make any sign. Turning, he saw her, suddenly.

"You will receive some directions from Mr. Levi; take care you understand and execute them."

He touched the bell, and Levi opened the door; and she and that person walked together to the foot of the stair, where in a low tone they talked.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE CRISIS.

WHEN Phœbe Chiffinch returned to Alic
room, it was about ten o'clock; a b
liant moon was shining on the old trees, a
throwing their shadows on the misty gra
The landscape from these upper windows v
sad and beautiful, and above the distant tr
that were softened by the haze of night rose
silvery spire of the old church, in whose va
her father sleeps with a cold brain, thinking
more of mortgages and writs.

Alice had been wondering what had detai
her so long, and by the time she arrived had
come very much alarmed.

Relieved when she entered, she was ag
struck with fear when Phœbe Chiffinch l

come near enough to enable her to see her face. She was pale, and with her eyes fixed on her, raised her finger in warning, and then glanced at the door which she had just closed.

Her young mistress got up and approached her, also growing pale, for she perceived that danger was at the door.

"I wish there was bolts to these doors. They've got other keys. Never mind; I know it all now," she whispered, as she walked softly up to the end of the room fartherest from the door. "I said I'd stand by you, my lady; don't you lose heart. They're coming here in about an hour."

"For God's sake, what is it?" said Alice faintly, her eyes gazing wider and wider, and her very lips growing white.

"There's work before us, my lady, and there must be no fooling," said the girl, a little sternly. "Mr. Levice, please, has told me a deal, and all they expect from me, the villains. Are you strong enough to take your part in it, miss? If not, best be quiet; best for both."

"Yes; quite strong, Phœbe. Are we to leave this?"

"I hope, miss. We can but try."

"There's light, Phœbe," she said, glancing with a shiver from the window. "It's a bright night."

"I wish 'twas darker; but mind you what I say. Longcluse is to be here in an hour. Your brother's coming, God help you! and that little limb o' Satan, that black-eyed, black-nailed, dirty little Jew, Levice! They're not in town, they're out together near this, where a man is to meet them with writings. There's a licence got, Christie Vargers saw Mr. Longcluse showing it to your brother, Sir Richard; and I daren't tell Vargers that I'm for you. He'd never do nothing to vex Mr. Levice, he daren't. There's a parson here, a rum 'un, you may be sure. I think I know something about him; Vargers does. He's in the room now, only one away from this, next the stair-head, and Vargers is put to keep the door in the same room. All the doors along, from one room to t'other, is open, from this to the stairs, except the last, which Vargers has the key of it; and all the doors opening from the rooms to the gallery is locked, so you can't get out o' this 'ere without passing

through the one where parson is, and Mr. Vargers, please."

"I'll speak to the clergyman," whispered Alice, extending her hands towards the far door; "God be thanked, there's one good man here, and he'll save me!"

"La, bless you, child! why, that parson had his two pen'orth long ago, and spends half his nights in the lock-up."

"I don't understand, Phœbe."

"He had two years. He's bin in jail, miss, Vargers says, as often as he has fingers and toes; and he's at his brandy and water as I came through, with his feet on the fender, and his pipe in his mouth. He's here to marry you, please 'm, to Mr. Longcluse, and *there's* all the good *he'll* do you; and your brother will give you away, miss, and Levice and Vargers for witnesses, and me, I dessay. It's every bit harranged, and they don't care the rinsing of a tumbler what you say or do; for, through with it, slicks, they'll go, and say 'twas all right, in spite of all you can do; and who is there to make a row about it? Not you, after all's done."

"We must get away! I'll lose my life, or I'll escape!"

Phœbe looked at her in silence. I think she was measuring her strength, and her nerve, for the undertaking.

"Well, 'm, it's time it was begun. The time is come. Here's your cloak, miss, I'll tie a handkerchief over my head, if we get out; and here's the three keys, betwixt the bed and the mattress."

After a moment's search on her knees, she produced them.

"The big one and this I'll keep, and you'll manage this other, please; take it in your right hand—you must use it first. It opens the far door of the room where Vargers is, and if you get through, you'll be at the stair-head then. Don't you come in after me, till you see I have Vargers engaged another way. Go through as light as a bird flies, and take the key out of the door, at the other end, when you unlock it; and close it softly, else he'll see it, and have the house about our ears; and you know the big window at the drawing-room lobby; wait in the hollow of that

window till I come. Do you understand, please, miss?"

Alice did perfectly.

"Hish-sh!" said the maid, with a prolonged caution.

A dead silence followed; for a minute—several minutes—neither seemed to breathe.

Phœbe whispered at length—

"*Now*, miss, are you ready?"

"Yes," she whispered, and her heart beat for a moment as if it would suffocate her, and then was still; an icy chill stole over her, and as on tip-toe she followed Phœbe, she felt as if she glided without weight or contact, like a spirit.

Through a dark room they passed, very softly, first, a little light under the door showed that there were candles in the next. They halted and listened. Phœbe opened the door and entered.

Standing back in the shadow, Alice saw the room and the people in it, distinctly. The parson was not the sort of contraband clergyman she had fancied, by any means, but a thin hectic man of some four-and-thirty years, only looking a little dazed by brandy and water, and far gone

in consumption. Handsome thin features, and a suit of seedy black, and a white choker, indicated that lost gentleman, who was crying silently as he smoked his pipe, I dare say a little bit tipsy, gazing into the fire, with his fatal brandy and water at his elbow.

"Eh! Mr. Vargers, smoking after *all* I said to you!" murmured Miss Phœbe severely, advancing toward her round-shouldered sweetheart, with her finger raised.

Mr. Vargers replied pleasantly; and as this tender "chaff" flew lightly between the interlocutors, the parson looked still into the fire, hearing nothing of their play and banter, but sunk deep in the hell of his sorrowful memory.

As Phœbe talked on, Vargers grew agreeable and tender, and, in about three minutes after her own entrance, she saw with a thrill, imperfectly, just with the "corner of her eye," something pass behind them swiftly toward the outer door. The crisis, then, had come. For a moment there seemed a sudden light before her eyes, and then a dark mist; in another, she recovered herself.

Vargers stood up suddenly.

"Hullo! what's gone with the door there?" said he, sternly ending their banter.

If he had been looking on her with an eye of suspicion, he might have seen her colour change. But Phœbe was quick-witted and prompt, and saying, in hushed tones—

"Well, dear, ain't I a fool, leaving the lady's door open? Look ye, now, Mr. Vargers, she's lying fast asleep on her bed; and that's the reason I took courage to come here and ask a favour. But I'd raythe you'd lock her door, for if she waked and missed me she'd be out here, and all the fat in the fire."

"I dessay you're right, miss," said he, with a more business-like gallantry; and as he shut the door and fumbled in his pocket for the key, she stole a look over her shoulder.

The prisoner had got through, and the door at the other end was closed.

With a secret shudder, she thanked God in her heart, while with a laugh she slapped Mr. Vargers' lusty shoulder, and said wheedlingly, "And now for the favour, Mr. Vargers: you

must let me down to the kitchen for five minutes."

A little more banter and sparring followed, which ended in Vargers kissing her, in spite of the usual squall and protest; and on his essaying to let her out, and finding the door unlocked, he swore that it was well she had asked, as he'd 'av' got it hot and 'eavy for forgetting to lock it, when the "swells" came up. The door closed upon her: so far the enterprise was successful.

She stood at the head of the stairs; she went down a few steps, and listened; then cautiously she descended. The moon shone resplendent through the great window at the landing below the drawing-room. It was that at which Uncle David had paused to listen to the minstrelsy of of Mr. Longcluse.

Here in that flood of white light stands Alice Arden, like a statue of horror. The girl, without saying a word, takes her by the cold hand, and leads her quickly down to the arch that opens on the hall.

Just as they reached this point, the door of the room, at the right of the hall-door, occupied

by Mr. Boult, who did duty as porter, opens, and stepping out with a candle in his hand, he calls in a savage tone—

"What's the row?"

Phœbe pushed Alice's hand in the direction of the passage that leads to the housekeeper's room. For a moment the young lady stands irresolute. Her presence of mind returns. She noiselessly takes the hint, and enters the corridor; Phœbe advances to answer his challenge.

"Well, Mr. Boult, and what *is* the row, pray?" she pertly inquires, walking up to that gentleman, who eyes her sulkily, raising his candle, and displaying as he does so a big patch of red on each cheek-bone, indicative of the brandy, of which he smells potently.

"What's the row?—*you're* the row! What brings you down here, Miss Chivvige?"

"My legs! There's your answer, you cross boy." She laughed wheedlingly.

"Then walk you up again, and be d—d."

"Oh! Mr. Boult."

"P! Miss Phibbie."

Mr. Boult was speaking thick, and plainly was in no mood to stand nonsense.

"Now, Mr. Boult, where's the good of making yourself disagreeable?"

"Look at this 'ere," he replied, grimly holding a mighty watch, of some white metal, under her eyes—"you know your clock as well as me, Miss Chavvinge. The gentlemen will be in this e're awl, in twenty minutes."

"All the more need to be quick, Mr. Boult, sir, and why will you keep me 'ere talking?" she replies.

"You'll go up them 'ere stairs, young 'oman; you'll not put a foot in the kitchen to-night," he says, more doggedly.

"Well, we'll see how it will be when they comes, and I tells 'em—'Please, gentlemen, the young lady, which you told me most particular to humour her in everything she might call for, wished a cup of tea, which I went down, having locked her door first, which here is the key of it,'" and she held it up for the admiration of Mr. Boult, "'which I consider it the most importantest key in the 'ouse; and though the young lady, she lay on her bed a-gasping, poor thing, for her cup of tea, Mr. Boult, stopt me in the awl, and swore she shouldn't have a drop,

which I could not get it, and went hup again, for he smelt all over of brandy, and spoke so wiolent, I daren't do as you desired.'"

"I don't smell of brandy; no, I don't; do I?" he says, appealing to an imaginary audience. "And I don't want to stop you, if so be the case is so. But you'll come to this door and report yourself in five minutes' time, or I'll tell 'em there's no good keepin' me 'ere no longer. I don't want no quarrellin' nor disputin', only I'll do my dooty, and I'm not afraid of man, woman, or child!"

With which magnanimous sentiment he turned on his clumsy heel, and entered his apartment again.

In a moment more Phœbe and Alice were at the door which admits to a passage leading literally to the side of the house. This door Phœbe softly unlocks, and when they had entered, locks again on the inside. They stood now on the passage leading to a side door, to which a few paces brought them. She opens it. The cold night air enters, and they step out upon the grass. She locks the door behind them, and

throws the key among the nettles that grew in a thick grove at her right.

"Hold my hand, my lady; it's near done now," she whispers almost fiercely; and having listened for a few seconds, and looked up to see if any light appeared in the windows, she ventures, with a beating heart, from under the deep shadow of the gables, into the bright broad moonlight, and with light steps together they speed across the grass, and reaches the cover of a long grove of tall trees and underwood. All is silent here.

Soon a distant shouting brings them to a terrible stand-still. Breathlessly Phœbe listens. No; it was not from the house. They resume their flight.

Now under the ivy-laden branches of a tall old tree an owl startles them with its shriek.

As Alice stares around her, when they stop in such momentary alarm, how strange the scene looks! How immense and gloomy the trees about them! How black their limbs stretch across the moon-lit sky! How chill and wild the moonlight spreads over the undulating sward! What a spectral and exaggerated shape

all things take in her scared and over-excited gaze!

Now they are approaching the long row of noble beeches that line the boundary of Mort-lake. The ivy-bowered wall is near them, and the screen of gigantic hollies that guard the lonely postern through which Phœbe has shrewdly chosen to direct their escape.

Thank God! they are at it. In her hand she holds the key, which shines in the moon-beams.

Hush! what is this? Voices close to the door! Step back behind the holly clump, for your lives, quickly! A key grinds in the lock; the bolt works rustily; the door opens, and tall Mr. Longcluse enters, with every sinister line and shadow of his pale face marked with a death-like sternness, in the moonlight. Mr. Levi enters almost beside him; how white his big eyeballs gleam, as he steps in under the same cold light! Who next?

Her *brother!* Oh, God! The mad impulse to throw her arms about his neck, and shriek her wild appeal to his manhood, courage, love, and stake all on that momentary frenzy!

As this group halts in silence, while Sir Richard locks the door, the Jew directs his big dark eyes, as she thinks, right upon Phœbe Chiffinch, who stands in the shadow, and is therefore, she faintly hopes, not visible behind the screen of glittering leaves. Her eyes, nevertheless, meet his. He advances his head a little, with more than his usual prying malignity, she thinks. Her heart flutters, and sinks. She is on the point of stepping from her shelter and surrendering. With his cane he strikes at the leaves, aiming, I dare say, at a moth, for nothing is quite below his notice, and he likes smashing even a fly. In this case, having hit or missed it, he turns his fiery eyes, to the infinite relief of the girl, another way.

The three men who have thus stept into the grounds of Mortlake don't utter a word as they stand there. They now recommence their walk toward the house.

Phœbe Chiffinch, breathless, is holding Alice Arden's wrist with a firm grasp. As they brush the holly-leaves, in passing, the very sprays that touch the dresses of the scared girls are stirring. The pale group drifts by in silence.

They have each something to meditate on. They are not garrulous. On they walk, like three shadows. The distance widens, the shapes grow fainter.

"They'll soon be at the house, ma'am, and wild work then. You'll do something for poor Vargers? Well, time enough! You must not lose heart now, my lady. You're all right, if you keep up for ten minutes longer. You don't feel faint-like? Good lawk, ma'am! rouse up."

"I'm better, Phœbe; I'm quite well again. Come on—come on!"

Carefully, to make as little noise as possible she turned the key in the lock, and they found themselves in a narrow lane running by the wall, and under the old trees of Mortlake.

"Which way?"

"Not toward the 'Guy of Warwick.' They'll soon be in chase of us, and that is the way they'll take. 'Twould never do. Come away, my lady; it won't be long till we meet a cab or something to fetch us where you please. Lean on me. I wish we were away from this wall. What way do you mean to go?"

"To my Uncle David's house."

And having exchanged these words, pursued their way, side by side, for a tim silence.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### PURSUIT.

ARRIVED at Mortlake, when Mr. Longcluse had discovered with certainty the flight of Alice Arden, his first thought was that Sir Richard had betrayed him. There was a momentary paroxysm of insane violence, in which, if he could only have discovered that he was the accomplice of Alice's escape, I think he would have killed him.

It subsided. How could Alice Arden have possessed such an influence over this man, who seemed to hate her? He sat down, and placed his hand to his broad, pale forehead, his dark eyes glaring on the floor in, what seemed, an intensity of thought and passion. He was seized with a violent trembling fit. It lasted

only for a few minutes. I sometimes think he loved that girl desperately, and would have made her an idolatrous husband.

He walked twice or thrice up and down the great parlour in which they sat, and then with cold malignity said to Sir Richard—

"But for you she would have married me; but for you I should have secured her now. *Consider*, how shall I settle with you?"

"Settle how you will—do what you will. I swear (and he did swear hard enough, if an oath could do it, to satisfy any man) I've had *nothing* to do with it. I've never had a hint that she meditated leaving this place. I can't conceive how it was done, nor who managed it, and I know no more than you do where she is gone. And he clenched his vehement disclaimer with an imprecation.

Longcluse was silent for a minute.

"She has gone, I assume, to David Arden's house," he said, looking down. "There is no other house to receive her in town, and she does not know that he is away still. She knows that Lady May, and other friends, have gone. She's *there*. The will makes you, colourably, her

guardian. You shall claim the custody of her person. We'll go there, and remove her."

Old Sir Reginald's will, I may remark, had been made years before, when Richard was not twenty-two, and Alice little more than a child, and the Baronet and his son good friends.

He stalked out. At the steps was his trap, which was there to take Levi into town. That gentleman, I need not say, he did not treat with much ceremony. He mounted, and Sir Richard Arden beside him; and, leaving the Jew to shift for himself, he drove at a furious pace down the avenue. The porter placed there by Longcluse, of course, opened the gate instantaneously at his call. Outside stood a cab, with a trunk on it. An old woman at the lodge-window, knocking and clamouring, sought admission.

"Let no one in," said Longcluse sternly to the man, who locked the iron gate on their passing out.

"Hallo! What brings *her* here? That's the old housekeeper!" said Longcluse, pulling up suddenly.

It was quite true. Her growing uneasiness

about Alice had recalled the old woman from the North. Martha Tansey, who had heard the clang of the gate and the sound of wheels and hoofs, turned about and came to the side of the tax-cart, over which Longcluse was leaning. In the brilliant moonlight, on the white road, the branches cast a network of black shadow. A patch of light fell clear on the side of the trap, and on Longcluse's ungloved hand as he leaned on it.

"Here am I, Martha Tansey, has lived fifty year wi' the family, and what for am I shut out of Mortlake now?" she demanded, with stern audacity.

A sudden change, however, came over her countenance, which contracted in horror, and her old eyes opened wide and white, as she gazed on the back of Longcluse's hand, on which was a peculiar star-shaped scar. She drew back with a low sound, like the growl of a wicked old cat; it rose gradually to such a yell and a cry to God as made Richard's blood run cold, and lifting her hand toward her temple, waveringly, the old woman staggered back, and fell in a faint on the road.

Longcluse jumped down and hammered at the window. "Hallo!" he cried to the man, "send one of your people with this old woman; she's ill. Let her go in that cab to Sir Richard Arden's house in town; you know it." And he cried to the cabman, "Lift her in, will you?"

And having done his devoir thus by the old woman, he springs again into his tax-cart, snatches the reins from Sir Richard, and drives on at a savage pace for town.

Longcluse threw the reins to Sir Richard when they reached David Arden's house, and himself thundered at the door.

They had searched Mortlake House for Alice, and that vain quest had not wasted more than half an hour. He rightly conjectured that if Alice had fled to David Arden's house, some of the servants who received her must be still on the alert. The door is opened promptly by an elderly servant woman.

"Sir Richard Arden is at the door, and he wants to know whether his sister, Miss Arden, has arrived here from Mortlake."

"Yes, sir; she's upstairs; but not by no means well, sir."

Longcluse stepped in, to secure a footing, and beckoning excitedly to Sir Richard, called, "Come in; all right. Don't mind the horse; it will take its chance." He walked impatiently to the foot of the stairs, and turned again toward the street door.

At this moment, and before Sir Richard had time to come in, there come swarming out of David Arden's study, most unexpectedly, nearly a dozen men, more than half of whom are in the garb of gentlemen, and some three of them police. Uncle David himself, in deep conversation with two gentlemen, one of whom is placing in his breast-pocket a paper which he has just folded, leads the way into the hall.

As they there stand for a minute under the lamp, Mr. Longcluse, gazing at him sternly from the stair, caught his eye. Old David Arden stepped back a little, growing pale, with a sudden frown.

"Oh! Mr. Arden?" says Longcluse, advancing as if he had come in search of him.

"That's enough, sir," cries Mr. Arden, extending his hand peremptorily toward him; and he

adds with a glance at the constables, "*There's* the man. That is Walter Longcluse."

Longcluse glances over his shoulder; and then grimly at the group before him, and gathered himself as if for a struggle; the next moment he walks forward frankly, and asks, "What is the meaning of all this?"

"A warrant, sir," answers the foremost policeman, clutching him by the collar.

"No use, sir, making a row," expostulates the next, also catching him by the collar and arm.

"Mr. Arden, can you explain this?" says Mr. Longcluse coolly.

"You may as well give in quiet," says the third policeman, producing the warrant. "A warrant for murder. Walter Longcluse, *alias* Yelland Mace, I arrest you in the Queen's name."

"There's a magistrate here? Oh! yes, I see. How d'ye do, Mr. Harman? My name is Longcluse, as you know. The name Mays, or any other *alias*, you'll not insult me by applying to me, if you please. Of course this is obvious and utter trumpery. Are there informations, or what the devil is it?"

"They have just been sworn before me, sir,' answered the magistrate, who was a little man, with a wave of his hand and his head high.

"Well, really! don't you *see* the absurdity? Upon my soul! It *is* really *too* ridiculous! You won't inconvenience me, of course, unnecessarily. My own recognisance, I suppose, will do?"

"Can't entertain your application; quite out of the question," said his worship, with his hands in his pockets, rising slightly on his toes, and descending on his heels, as he delivered this sentence with a stoical shake of his head.

"You'll send for my attorney, of course? I'm not to be humbugged, you know."

"I must tell you, Mr. Longcluse, I can't listen to such language," observes Mr. Harman sublimely.

"If you have informations, they are the dreams of a madman. I don't blame any one here. I say, policeman, you need not hold me quite so hard. I only say, joke or earnest, I can't make head or tail of it; and there's not a man in London who won't be shocked to hear how I've been treated. Once more, Mr. Harman,

I tender bail, any amount. It's too ridiculous You can't really have a difficulty."

"The informations are very strong, sir, and the offence, you know as well as I do, Mr. Longcluse, is not bailable."

Mr. Longcluse shrugged, and laughed gently.

"I may have a cab or something? My trap's at the door. It's not solemn enough, eh, Mr. Harman? Will you tell one of your fellows to pick up a cab? Perhaps, Mr. Arden, you'll allow me a chair to sit down upon?"

"You can sit in the study, if you please," says David Arden.

And Longcluse enters the room with the police about him, while the servant goes to look for a cab. Sir Richard Arden, you may be sure, was not there. He saw that something was wrong, and he had got away to his own house. On arriving there, he sent to make inquiry, cautiously, at his uncle's, and thus learned the truth.

Standing at the window, he saw his messenger return, let him in himself, and then considered, as well as a man in so critical and terrifying a situation can, the wisest course for

him to adopt. The simple one of flight he ultimately resolved on. He knew that Longcluse had still two executions against him, on which at any moment he might arrest him. He knew that he might launch at him at any moment the thunderbolt which would blast him. He must wait, however, until the morning had confirmed the news; that certain, he dared not act.

With a cold and fearless bearing, Longcluse had by this time entered the dreadful door of a prison. His attorney was with him nearly the entire night.

David Arden, as he promised, had dictated to him in outline the awful case he had massed against his client.

"I don't want any man taken by surprise or at disadvantage; I simply wish for truth," said he.

A copy of the written statement of Paul Davies, whatever it was worth, duly witnessed, was already in his hands; the sworn depositions of the same person, made in his last illness, were also there. There were also the sworn depositions of Vanboeren, who *had*, after all, recovered speech and recollection; and a deposition, be-

sides, very unexpected, of old Martha Tansey, who swore distinctly to the scar, a very peculiar mark indeed, on the back of his left hand. This the old woman had recognised with horror, at a moment so similar, as the scar, long forgotten, which she had for a terrible moment, seen on the hand of Yelland Mace, as he clutched the rail of the gig, while engaged in the murder.

The plaster masks, which figured in the affidavits of Vanboeren, and of David Arden, were re-cast from the moulds, and made an effectual identification, corroborated, in a measure, by Mr. Plumes' silhouette of Yelland Mace.

Other surviving witnesses had also turned up, who had deposed when the murder of Harry Arden was a recent event. The whole case was, in the eyes of the attorney, a very awful one. Mr. Longcluse's counsel was called up, like a physician whose patient is *in extremis*, at dead of night, and had a talk with the attorney, and kept his notes to ponder over.

As early as prison rules would permit, he was with Mr. Longcluse, where the attorney awaited him.

Mr. Blinkinsop looked very gloomy.

"Do you despair?" asked Mr. Longcluse sharply, after a long disquisition.

"Let me ask you one question, Mr. Longcluse. You have, before I ask it, I assume, implicit confidence in us; am I right?"

"Certainly—implicit."

"If you are innocent we might venture on a line of defence which may possibly break down the case for the Crown. If you are guilty, that line would be fatal." He hesitated, and looked at Mr. Longcluse.

"I know such a question has been asked in like circumstances, and I have no hesitation in telling you that I am *not* innocent. Assume my guilt."

The attorney, who had been drumming a little tattoo on the table, watches Longcluse earnestly as he speaks, suspending his tune, now lowers his eyes to the table, and resumed his drumming slowly with a very dismal countenance. He had been talking over the chances with this eminent counsel, Mr. Blinkinsop, Q.C., and he knew what his opinion would now be.

"One effect of a judgment in this case is forfeiture?" inquired Mr. Longcluse.

"Yes," answered counsel.

"Everything goes to the Crown, eh?"

"Yes; clearly."

"Well, I have neither wife nor children. I need not care; but suppose I make my will now; that's a good will, ain't it, between this and judgment, if things should go wrong?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Blinkinsop. "No judgment no forfeiture."

"And now, doctor, don't be afraid; tell me truly, shall I *do?*" said Mr. Longcluse, leaning back, and looking darkly and steadily in his face.

"It is a nasty case."

"Don't be afraid, I say. I should like to know, are the chances two to one against me?"

"I'm afraid they are."

"Ten to one? Pray say what you think."

"Well, I think so."

Mr. Longcluse grew paler. They were all three silent. After about a minute, he said, in a very low tone—

"You don't think I have a chance? Don't mislead me."

"It is very gloomy."

Mr. Longcluse pressed his hand to his mouth. There was a silence. Perhaps he wished to hide some nervous movement there. He stood up, walked about a little, and then stood by Mr. Blinkinsop's chair, with his fingers on the back of it.

"We must make a great fight of this," said Mr. Longcluse suddenly. "We'll fight it hard; we must win it. We *shall* win it, by——"

And after a short pause, he added gently—

"That will do. I think I'll rest now; more, perhaps, another time. Good-bye."

As they left the room, he signed to the attorney to stay.

"I have something for you—a word or two."

The attorney turned back, and they remained closeted for a time.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### CONCLUSION.

SIR RICHARD ARDEN had learned how matters were with Mr. Longcluse. He hesitated. Flight might provoke action of the kind for which there seemed no longer a motive.

In an agony of dubitation, as the day wore on, he was interrupted. Mr. Rooke, Mr. Longcluse's attorney, had called. There was no good in shirking a meeting. He was shown in.

"This is for you, Sir Richard," said Mr. Rooke, presenting a large letter. "Mr. Longcluse wrote it about three hours ago, and requested me to place it in your own hand, as I now do."

"It is not any *legal* paper——" began Sir Richard.

"I haven't an idea," answered he. "He

gave it to me thus. I had some things to do for him afterwards, and a call to make, at his desire, at Mr. David Arden's. When I got home I was sent for again. I suppose you heard the news?"

"No; what is it?"

"Oh, dear, really! They have heard it some time at Mr. Arden's. You didn't hear about Mr. Longcluse?"

"No, nothing, excepting what we all know—his arrest."

The attorney's countenance darkened, and he said, dropping his voice as low as he would have given a message in church—

"Oh, poor gentleman! he died to-day. Some kind of fit, I believe; he's gone!"

Then Mr. Rooke went into particulars, so far as he knew them, and mentioned that the coroner's inquest would be held that afternoon; and so he departed.

Unmixed satisfaction accompanied the hearing of this news in Sir Richard's mind. But with reflection came the terrifying question, "Has Levi got hold of that instrument of torture and ruin—the forged signature?"

In this new horror he saw the envelope which Rooke had handed to him, upon the table. He opened it, and saw the forged deed. Written across it, in Longcluse's hand, were the words—

"Paid by W. Longcluse before due.

"W. LONGCLUSE."

That day's date was added.

So the evidence of his guilt was no longer in the hands of a stranger, and Sir Richard Arden was saved.

David Arden had already received under like circumstances, and by the same hand, two papers of immense importance. The first written in Rooke's hand and duly witnessed, was a very short will, signed by the testator, Walter Longcluse, and leaving his enormous wealth absolutely to David Arden. The second was a letter which attached a trust to this bequest. The letter said—

"I am the son of Edwin Raikes, your cousin. He had cast me off for my vices, when I committed the crime, not intended to have amounted to murder. It was Harry Arden's determined resistance and my danger that cost him his life. I did kill Lebas. I could not help it. He was a fool, and might have ruined me; and that villain, Vanboeren, has spoken truth for once.

"I meant to set up the Arden family in my person. I should have taken the name. My father relented on his death-bed, and left me his money. I went to New York, and received it. I made a new start in life. On the Bourse in Paris, and in Vienna, I made a fortune by speculation: I improved it in London. You take it all by my will. Do with half the interest as you please, during your lifetime. The other half pay to Miss Alice Arden, and the entire capital you are to secure to her on your death.

"I had taken assignments of all the mortgages affecting the Arden estates. They must go to Miss Arden, and be secured unalienably to her.

"My life has been arduous and direful. That miserable crime hung over me, and its dangers impeded me at every turn.

"You have played your game well, but with all the odds of the position in your favour. I am tired, beaten. The match is over, and you may rise now and say Checkmate.

"WALTER LONGCLUSE."

That Longcluse had committed suicide, of course I can have no doubt. It must have been effected by some unusually subtle poison. The post-mortem examination failed to discover its presence. But there was found in his desk a curious paper, in French, published about five months before, upon certain vegetable poisons, whose presence in the system no chemical test detects, and no external trace records. This paper was noted here and there on the margin,

and had been obviously carefully read. Any of these tinctures he could without much trouble have procured from Paris. But no distinct light was ever thrown upon this inquiry.

In a small and lonely house, tenanted by Longcluse, in the then less crowded region of Richmond, were found proofs, no longer needed, of Longcluse's identity, both with the horseman who had met Paul Davies on Hampstead Heath, and the person who crossed the Channel from Southampton with David Arden, and afterwards met him in the streets of Paris, as we have seen. There he had been watching his movements, and traced him, with dreadful suspicion, to the house of Vanboeren. The turn of a die had determined the fate of David Arden that night. Longcluse had afterwards watched and seized an opportunity of entering Vanboeren's house. He knew that the Baron expected the return of his messenger, rang the bell, and was admitted. The old servant had gone to her bed, and was far away in that vast house.

Longcluse would have stabbed him, but the Baron recognized him, and sprang back with a yell. Instantly Longcluse had used his revolver;

but before he could make assurance doubly sure, his quick ear detected a step outside. He then made his exit through a window into a deserted lane at the side of the house, and had not lost a moment in commencing his flight for London.

With respect to the murder of Lebas, the letter of Longcluse pretty nearly explains it. That unlucky Frenchman had attended him through his recovery under the hands of Vanboeren; and Longcluse feared to trust, as it now might turn out, his life in his giddy keeping. Of course, Lebas had no idea of the nature of his crime, or that in England was the scene of its perpetration. Longcluse had made up his mind promptly on the night of the billiard-match played in the Saloon Tavern. When every eye was fixed upon the balls, he and Lebas met, as they had ultimately agreed, in the smoking-room. A momentary meeting it was to have been. The dagger which he placed in his keeping, Longcluse plunged into his heart. In the stream of blood that instantaneously flowed from the wound Longcluse stepped, and made one distinct impression of his boot-sole on the boards. A tracing of this Paul Davies had

made, and had got the signatures of two or three respectable Londoners before the room filled, attesting its accuracy, he affecting, while he did so, to be a member of the detective police, from which body, for a piece of *over*-cleverness, he had been only a few weeks before dismissed. Having made his tracing, he obscured the blood-mark on the floor.

The opportunity of distinguishing himself at his old craft, to the prejudice of the force, whom he would have liked to mortify, while earning, perhaps, his own restoration, was his first object. The delicacy of the shape of the boot struck him next. He then remembered having seen Longcluse—and his was the only eye that observed him—pass swiftly from the passage leading to the smoking-room at the beginning of the game. His mind had now matter to work upon; and hence his visit to Bolton Street to secure possession of the boot, which he did by an audacious *ruse*.

His subsequent interview with Mr. Longcluse, in presence of David Arden, was simply a concerted piece of acting, on which Longcluse, when he had made his terms with Davies, insisted,

as a security against the re-opening of the extortion.

Nothing will induce Alice to accept one farthing of Longcluse's magnificent legacy. Secretly Uncle David is resolved to make it up to her from his own wealth, which is very great.

Richard Arden's story is not known to any living person but the Jew Levi, and vaguely to his sister, in whose mind it remains as something horrible, but never approached.

Levi keeps the secret for reasons more cogent than charitable. First he kept it to himself as a future instrument of profit. But on his insinuating something that promised such relations to Sir Richard, the young gentleman met it with so bold a front, with fury so unaffected, and with threats so alarming, founded upon a trifling matter of which the Jew had never suspected his knowledge, that Mr. Levi has not ventured either to "utilise" his knowledge, in a profitable way, or afterwards to circulate the story for the solace of his malice. They seem, in Mr. Rooke's phrase, to have turned their backs on one another; and as some years have passed, and lapse of time does not improve the case of

a person in Mr. Levi's position, we may safely assume that he will never dare to circulate any definite stories to Sir Richard's prejudice. A sufficient motive, indeed, for doing so exists no longer, for Sir Richard, who had lived an unsettled life travelling on the Continent, and still playing at foreign tables when he could afford it, died suddenly at Florence in the autumn of '69.

Vivian Darnley has been in "the House," now, nearly four years. Uncle David is very proud of him; and more impartial people think that he will, at last, take an honourable place in that assembly. His last speech has been spoken of everywhere with applause. David Arden's immensely increased wealth enables him to entertain very magnificent plans for this young man. He intends that he shall take the name of Arden, and earn the transmission of the title, or the distinction of a greater one.

A year ago Vivian Darnley married Alice Arden, and no two people can be happier.

Lady May, although her girlish ways have not forsaken her, has no present thoughts of making any man happy. She had a great cry

all to herself when Sir Richard died, and she now persuades herself that he never meant one word he said of her, and that if the truth were known, although after that day she never spoke to him more, he had never really cared for more than one woman on earth. It was all spite of that odious Lady Wynderbroke!

Alice has never seen Mortlake since the night of her flight from its walls.

The two old servants, Crozier and Martha Tansey, whose acquaintance we made in that suburban seat of the Ardens, are both, I am glad to say, living still, and extremely comfortable.

Phœbe Chiffinch, I am glad to add, was jilted by her uninteresting lover, who little knew what a fortune he was slighting. His desertion does not seem to have broken her heart, or at all affected her spirits. The gratitude of Alice Arden has established her in the prosperous little Yorkshire town, the steep roofs, chimneys, and church tower of which are visible, among the trees, from the windows of Arden Court. She is the energetic and popular proprietress of the "Cat and Fiddle," to which thriving inn, at a nominal rent, a valuable farm is attached. A

fortune of two thousand pounds from the same grateful friend awaits her marriage, which can't be far off, with the handsome son of rich farmer Shackleton.

THE END.

LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS
# FOR THE NEW YEAR.

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